

COMIC.

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Vol. I.

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SHOO-FLY:

OR,
NOBODY'S MOKE.

Part I.

By TOM TEASER.

Part I.



"Raise him!" called out the master of ceremonies. The sweep was pulled down, and dripping from every part, Shoo-Fly arose out of the well.

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SHOO-FLY; or, NOBODY'S MOKE.

By TOM TEASER.

Part I.

CHAPTER I.

"Shoo Fly! don't bodder me!
Shoo Fly! don't bodder me!
Shoo Fly! don't bodder me!
I belong to Company G."

OLD Deacon Betts reined in his horse as he heard this chorus float from the corn field alongside of the fence.

"Whoa, there, Zebedee!" called out the deacon to his horse, for the deacon was coming along the Boston turnpike with a load of apples.

"Who's that screeching?" demanded the deacon.

"Praise de Lam', the bluejay's singing,
Whoa dar, Moses in de shoebushes,
Gabriel, de dinner bell am ringing,
Whoa dar, Moses in de shoebushes,"

sounded the voice again.

"Wall, I swan," remarked the deacon, scratching his head, "that ere's a nigger's voice. Can't be Bill Tovee's Sam, for he's got the rheumatics—'sides, he's drunk."

"Halloo dar, ole man!" chuckled a voice, "whar youse gwine?"

The deacon fairly jumped from his seat in surprise.

He looked all around. No one was visible.

"What am youse star-gazin' for?" asked the voice again. "Who you spect ter see, me or de sun, ole man?"

The deacon tracked the voice this time.

There, sitting on the fence, almost concealed by a tree, was a little negro. One of the most comically gotten-up little nigs ever seen.

He was as black as ink, small in size, and was not ostentatious in regard to clothes.

Indeed, his whole wardrobe consisted of a flannel shirt, muchly worn, a tattered ulster, a pair of old, embroidered, worsted slippers, one lemon-colored kid glove, and a huge hat, six sizes too big for him, which nearly covered up his head.

"Who—who are you?" asked the deacon, stammering at the sight of the unexpected apparition.

"Name's Shoo-Fly."

"Shoo-Fly who?"

"Dat's all; jess Shoo-Fly."

"But what's your last name?"

"Nebber had any. Spect dat I lost it before I could remember it."

"But what was your father's name?"

"Hi, dar you catches me ag'in. Nebber had a fader. I was born in war times; couldn't afford to have no fader."

"Where did you come from, anyhow!" persisted the deacon.

"Grew on a tree. Dropped down afore I was ripe. Jess youse move 'long 'bout your business, ole man. Whar did youse get de skelington?"

"The what?"

"Dat yere skelington afront of de wagon. When am youse gwine fo' to shoot it?"

The deacon got out of his wagon with great deliberation.

"Do you know who I am, you sassy brat?" he asked.

"De debbil?"

"No, sir, you black rascal. I am Deacon Josiah Exodus Betts."

"Dat's a dog-goned fine name. What's the skelington's name, sah?"

The deacon advanced closer to the fence.

"I am one of the select men of the town," declared he, "and it is my duty to arrest all vagrants."

"Who am dem?"

"Who's who?"

"Vagrants."

"Folks that have no visible means of support."

Shoo-Fly laughed joyously.

"Den youse kaint scoop me in, ole man," said he, "fo' I'se got lots ob visible support. Ain't I'se on de stone fence? Reckon dat can support me."

All this time the deacon hadn't been idle. He had been creeping nearer and nearer.

With a sudden spring he grasped Shoo-Fly by the collar.

"Now I've got you," he victoriously exclaimed.

"Spect dat's so," said the little nigger, not a bit scared. "Dog-gone your soul, ole man, jess youse play easy wid dat ulster. Dat am all de clothes I got."

The deacon answered not a word. He marched his captive to the wagon and yanked him up on the seat.

Then he deliberately climbed in himself and picked up the reins.

"Lemme drive de skelington?" asked Shoo-Fly.

"Shut up!" sternly ordered the deacon. "G'lang, Zebedee."

"What youse gwine to do wid me, ole man?" queried Shoo-Fly, somewhat anxiously.

"I'm going to take you home to my house," replied the deacon.

"Be still."

Shoo-Fly collapsed.

All the rest of the drive he said nothing; but apparently he was thinking double.

Presently they arrived in front of a large, old-fashioned farm-house. A rambling sort of a house, that seemed too big for the ground it stood on, and looked as if it had been built in a prolonged drunk.

The deacon stopped in front of it.

"Dis de poor-house?" Shoo-Fly asked.

"It's my house," answered the deacon, rather sharply.

"Shoo! How much did you pay for it?"

"Three thousand dollars."

"Youse don't say so. Why didn't youse pay ten cents mo' an' get a good one?"

All the answer Shoo-Fly got was a slap on the ear.

"No sass," sententiously said the deacon.

Presently he called:

"Uncle Pete!"

"Hyar I am," replied an aged negro, coming out from the rear of the barn, and hobbling slowly down toward the gate.

"Who's dat?" Shoo-Fly said.

"Uncle Pete."

"Ki! am he wound up fo' all day?"

"What do you mean?"

"Goes wif a spring, doan't he? Youse doan't mean to say he am alive?"

"He'll show you soon enough."

"Dat am a trick nigger. Spect dat he's stuffed. Jess lemme spit on him for to see if he'll float. Jess—"

"That will do," checked the deacon. "Uncle Pete!"

"Yes, sah," rejoined the old darky.

"Here's a boy I brought home to help you about the house."

Uncle Pete took a good survey of Shoo-Fly.

"Wal, I declar, it's a nigger," he chuckled.

"Nigger bite paper collar," snapped Shoo-Fly. "Youse go 'way dar. I ain't a nigger; I'se culud, I is."

"One ob de new race ob no-account-mudder-takes-in-washing-piccadilly-collar-nigger-tramps," said Uncle Pete, in disgust. "He ain't no good."

"No?" said the deacon, amused in spite of himself.

"No—good 'nuff fo' to light de fire wid—dat's all."

Shoo-Fly got up on the seat. Quick as a flash he turned a somersault, landed exactly where he started from, swung himself once or twice, somersaulted off the seat on to the ground, walked around on his hands, and with a series of hand-springs landed in front of Uncle Pete.

"Dar!" he triumphantly exclaimed, "less see you do dat, ole stick-in-de-mud. Dat's what I call interlect. Dat yere takes de cake, ebery occasion!"

"Quit that pesky caper. Where did you learn the monkey tricks?" scoldingly observed the deacon.

"At de circus," answered Shoo-Fly.

"What circus?"

"Pettingill's Great American Circus an' Native English Menagerie. Juss runned away from it las' week kase de clown was going to make me sleep with de elephant."

The deacon smiled grimly, and Uncle Pete relapsed into a chuckle.

"Shall I unharness an' put the wagon in de barn?" asked he.

"Yes. Shoo-Fly, come with me," ordered the deacon.

Shoo-Fly obediently followed him up a gravelly path, bordered by prim flower beds, now simply squares of frozen earth.

Reaching the house they entered the sitting-room.

It was a typical New England sitting-room.

A rag carpet was on the floor, muslin curtains on the windows, a huge clock ticked away in one corner, opposite a grate fire crackled cheerfully, and several rush-bottomed chairs stood primly around.

On the mantel-shelf were two small China vases, and on the wall hung a cheap colored print of a green Abraham, very much bloated, endeavoring to sacrifice a paralyzed pink and orange Isaac, with what appeared to be an eel-spear.

The deacon took a chair, and motioned to Shoo-Fly to follow his example.

Shoo-Fly did so, first, however, carefully placing his hat on a second chair.

"Dat's my full-dress kady," he explained, "dat I scoop in de parties and funerals wid. Got to take terrible good keer ob it, kase de man dat makes dem is dead, an' can't make no more—'cepin' fo' de angels."

"Don't talk that way about angels," reproved the deacon.

"Dey won't kick about it."

"It is wicked."

"Shoo fly! you don't say so?"

Just then the door opened, and a female appeared.

She was one of those tall, gaunt females that send a cold shiver even to the heart of a tramp, and turn milk sour by a look.

"Well, brother?" said she.

The deacon twisted about uneasily on his chair, and looked first at her and then at Shoo-Fly.

"I brought a boy to help you about the house, Charity," finally he said.

"Did I ask you to get me anybody to help me around the house?"

"Wal, no, Charity; but I thought that he would help you around the house."

"Did I ask you ter?" propounded his sister, for so she was.

"Wal, no."

"Especially an African."

"Look here, missus," interrupted Shoo-Fly, "who youse 'ludin' to as African? Deedy, I amn't; I'se nigger—nigger—nigger; got nigger bref, and spit jes' like a nigger."

"Be still, you pesky critter," said the deacon, in an agony of apprehension.

As for Miss Charity, she favored Shoo-Fly with a distant look, such as she might have bestowed upon some far-away church steeple.

"Where did you come from?" asked she.

"S'pect I was drew in a lottery, ma'am."

"Where have you lived?"

"In de circus, ma'am. I saw de president's wife dere one night. She am de dead pictue ob youse, ma'am—pretty, jess like youse."

Miss Charity's heart was somewhat mollified by this timely praise.

"I'll take him on trial for awhile," said she. "Come with me, you—you—"

"Shoo-Fly, ma'am."

"Shoo-Fly, follow me; I'll show you what to do till dinner time."

The deacon watched them leave the room together with a smile on his face.

Taking out a real Connecticut segar he lit it, and remarked, as he puffed away:

"Wal, the black scamp sorter attracted me. But I was mighty afeerd that Charity would get riled about it. That gal's as ontsartan as Squire Holly's mule that kicked all the front out of the Rye meetin'-house."

Shoo-Fly was shown all about by Miss Charity, and put to work in the kitchen under her personal supervision. But nevertheless he found time to perpetrate several tricks.

At last dinner was ready.

It was none of your city lunches, a bite to ease the appetite, but a solid country square meal.

Uncle Pete waited on the table.

He looked sad.

His face was as long as a marble tomb-stone, and he kept his mouth tight shut.

Not a word said he, but passed the dishes about with the air of a man who expected to be buried in about an hour or so.

Now this silence was phenomenal in Uncle Pete, for he was generally the most garrulous old negro around.

The deacon noticed it.

"What ails you, Pete?" he asked.

Uncle Pete gave his head a sad and somber shake.

"Toothache?" continued the deacon.

"No, sah."

"Headache?"

"No, sah."

"Been stealing my hard cider?"

"No, sah."

"Has your beau gone back on you?"

"No, sah."

"Then what does ail you. Come, tell me?"

Uncle Pete sighed profoundly; the sigh of a man up to his ears in trouble.

"It's wusser dan any ob dese," he blurted out.

"Wal, let us know it?"

"Somebody done gone an' stole my store teef."

The deacon laughed heartily. Even Miss Charity smiled, for Pete's false teeth were the idol of his heart. He had spent about a year's wages buying them, and it was currently reported among all the small boys in the vicinity that when Uncle Pete's teeth were not in use he kept them in a satin case and said his prayers to them.

"How did you lose them?" Charity asked.

"I put dem in a tumbler out on de kitchen windy fo' today. Fust ting I knew when I went to look fo' dem—dey wasn't dar. Some debbil gone stoled dem, suah."

The deacon laughed again.

"Never mind, Pete," he said, "buy a set of wooden ones next time. Charity, where's Shoo-Fly?"

"In the kitchen."

"Call him."

"Shoo-Fly!" called Charity, "come in here, and bring the pudding along with you."

Presently Shoo-Fly appeared, staggering along under a huge dish of bread pudding.

He set it on the table, and Charity helped it out.

The deacon took a liberal helping.

"Who made this pudding?" presently growled he.

"Me," replied Charity.

"It's as tough as an old hen's gizzard."

"Josiah, I believe I can make bread pudding as good as any woman in Fairfield county."

"Wal, I guess you've made this out of rocks. Get me a hatchet, Shoo-Fly, till I cut it; the consarned stuff all sticks together. Guess you put in glue instead of milk, Charity."

"Shoo-Fly," interposed Charity, "you get him nothing."

"Let me have a crow-bar, anyhow," pleaded the deacon, struggling away with his pudding and trying to separate it with his spoon.

At last he gave it up and drew forth the whole mass on his fork.

The clinging pudding concealed a hard mass.

He hastily brushed it off.

"Wal, I'll be gosh darned!" exclaimed he, dropping back into his chair, "if it ain't Uncle Peter's teeth!"

Sure enough they were—large as life!

"Oh—oh!" Charity screamed. "I shall faint. Get me a glass of water, Shoo-Fly."

Shoo-Fly grabbed the first glass he saw. It had been used to hold small pickles and was full of vinegar. He didn't notice it, though.

Hastily he shoved it into Miss Charity's hand.

She took one swallow.

"You stupid nigger!" cried she, "it is vinegar!"

"Lawd a massa, who'd a think it!" exclaimed Shoo-Fly.

"Dem's my teef! Bress de Lamb!" shouted Uncle Pete, making himself heard above the uproar. "Yes, dat's dem. How de debbil did dey get into de puddin'?"

"Oh, hush," ejaculated Miss Charity, "I shall throw up."

"Doant youse do it heah," requested Shoo-Fly. "Mite spile de carpet."

With a groan she placed her handkerchief to her mouth and fled from the room.

"Pears to me dat de missus am putting on a lot ob airs," declared Uncle Pete, carefully cleansing his teeth with his coat-tails. "De teefe ain't hurt a speck!"

"But how did they get into the pudding?" the deacon asked.

Uncle Pete scratched his head.

"Deedy, I don't know."

"Do you know, Shoo-Fly?"

"No, sah," promptly answered Shoo-Fly, looking as guileless and truthful as if he had been a little angel, blacked up.

So it remained a mystery.

To all but Shoo-Fly.

It was he who had really put the teeth into the pudding.

"Jess for fun," was the excuse that he would probably have offered if he had been found out.

The next three or four days passed without any further deviltry on our little hero's part.

Finally Sunday came.

Sunday night Uncle Pete appeared all dressed up.

"Where youse gwine?" Shoo-Fly queried.

"To church, sah."

"T'ought dat dey had all the spittoons dat dey wanted dar."

"Youse too fresh, Shoo-Fly."

"An' youse too stale. Kin I go 'long?"

"Dis yeres cullud church, chile."

"Nigger ranche?"

"Dat's no way to speak ob de sanctuary. Dis yere am de Fust African Metterdist Episcopalan Roman Catholic Mohammedan Church, piccaninny."

"Where do dey store it week days?"

"Store what?"

"De name."

"Shoo-Fly," admonished Uncle Peter, solemnly, "youse am a chile ob sin an' shame. Spect dat it would do youse good fo' to be regenerated. Do youse really desire to go to church?"

"Laws, yes."

"Will youse behave yourself?"

"Like a little tin angel in de Christmas tree. Kin I go, Uncle Pete?"

"Youse won't make no trouble?"

"Not a mite."

"Den youse scurry on wid youse habiliments."

Shoo-Fly obeyed.

He dressed himself up regardless. Regardless of looks, for he wore the same stylish and extremely high toned costume he was in when introduced to our readers.

Church had not gone in yet when they arrived.

Quite a number of gallus darkies—coal-hued mashers—were standing on the stoop.

"What's dat you got wid you, Uncle Pete?" asked one.

"Somefin' dat he foun' in a prize package," yelled a second.

"Dat's a baboon!" said a third, and so they went for Shoo-Fly red-hot.

His costume came in also for free-and-easy criticism.

"Dat's a pretty ulster; he got it wid a prize cake."

"Dat hat's berry toney."

"Look at de kid gloves. Spect dat he got 'im wool up in curl papers."

"Doan't youse say nuffin', boys, he might get mad an' go off!"

That was the way they pitched into Shoo-Fly. And all the giddy young wenches laughed and giggled, and even the staid old fathers and mothers grinned.

"Reckon dat dey am habing a regular balloon descention wif me," reflected Shoo-Fly; "nebber min', I'll get square wid de gang."

Without a word of reply he followed Uncle Pete into the church.

They took a back seat.

Presently services began.

As the presiding elder grew violent and denunciatory in his opinions of sinners, Uncle Pete's eyes began to close.

Soon they were tight shut.

Soon, too, his head bobbed up and down, and his spectacles fell into his lap.

"Hi! de ole man's done gone asleep," chuckled Shoo-Fly; "spect dat I better skip fo' a while. Dat preacher will knock me dum wid dose free story words ub his'n."

Shoo-Fly slid slyly out into the vestibule.

A pail of water for drinking purposes was standing there.

Shoo-Fly took a drink.

Then he looked down at the stairs which led down to the ground.

Then he looked back at the pail again.

A broad smile came over his face and he did a noiseless essence of old Virginny.

"Golly, won't dey go down de stairs a kiting," he laughed.

Taking the pail up he carefully dripped the water all over the stairs.

Then he awaited developments.

Ten minutes sufficed to freeze the water and cover the steps with a thin coating of ice. The whole stairs were as slippery as could be.

Presently the sound of the doxology arose on the air. Church was letting out.

Shoo-Fly slipped down behind the stairs.

A moment's reverent stillness for the benediction, and then out piled the crowd.

They came forward with rush.

The first couple struck the top stairs and came down like greased lightning.

A venerable elder followed. He skipped down like a shot.

Pell-mell—helter-skelter, shouting and screaming in astonishment and dismay, the whole congregation slid and pitched down the slippery stairs in the most comical positions possible.

CHAPTER III.

Down the steps came the darkeys, yelling and screaming.

If some particularly fortunate nig happened to obtain a sure foothold, he was immediately dragged out of it by somebody else and pitched down with the rest.

The air was full of exclamations.

"Oh, lawd, whar am we gwine?"

"Dar goes my hat!"

"Jess lemme catch somebody squashing ob dat bonnet?"

"Youse pushing me, Brudder Johnsing!"

"Keep dat yer umbrella out ob my eye!"

"See heah, sah, I'd a got down all right if you hadn't clum down on top ob me!"

"You trip me up again, an' I'll cut youse wid a razor! you heah?"

"Spect dat more'n half ob us will be killed!"

That was the way they talked as they rolled down the steps with a great deal more rapidity than grace.

As for Shoo-Fly, he was tickled to death.

It beat a circus, and entirely eclipsed Fourth of July in his estimation.

"Keep it up—keep it up!" chuckled he; "dat's a nice, spectable way fo' to come out ob de church, ain't it? Golly, I'se ashamed ob youse niggers!"

Finally most all of the congregation arrived at the foot of the stairs.

They were a very much mussed-up set of colored people.

Noses were skinned, hats smashed, bonnets wrecked, dresses torn, and everything generally demoralized.

And they were mad.

Mad as the inhabitants of a disturbed hornets' nest.

They wanted to hurt somebody.

Prayed to get a hold of some unlucky chap with no friends, whom they could break all up.

"How de debbil did dose stairs get so slippery?" asked a big, fat negro, who had been walked over and kicked in the stomach by most everybody.

It was a hard conundrum.

Everybody gave it up.

But everybody was willing to take their oath that there wasn't a sign of ice on the steps when they went in.

"Mebbe it growed dar," suggested a simple-minded darkey.

He was pooh-poohed at, however, got clubbed by his wife with her parasol for making such a suggestion, and the conundrum still remained unsolved.

Uncle Pete had got down in safety, somehow, and had hung onto his precious "store teeth" all of the way.

He was in grief, however.

Shoo-Fly was missing.

"Anybody seen Shoo-Fly?" asked he.

"Who is he?" queried a friend.

"Dat little coon I had wid me. 'Spect dat he's killed."

Half a dozen set to work looking for Shoo-Fly at once. One man, who assuredly ought to have been a detective, even tramped up the stoop again and looked in under the door-mat to be sure that Shoo-Fly's corpse wasn't there.

The search was soon at an end.

For Shoo-Fly appeared from under the stairs and revealed himself.

"Heah I is," said he.

"T'ank goodness. T'ought mebbe dat youse was drownded on de stairs. Better come right 'long home."

Unluckily for Shoo-Fly, he was not destined to go home right then.

As he appeared, a solemn-looking little darkey, who was gazing with owlish gravity at nothing at all, looked at Shoo-Fly and broke into a grin.

His mother, who had had the stuffing of her Sunday hat all knocked to pieces until it resembled an accordian as much as anything else, and who consequently didn't feel like laughing for a cent, yanked him by the shoulders.

"What for you grin jess like a jackass, you good fo' nuffin' brat?" she sharply asked.

"Larfing at him," replied the little darkey, pointing at Shoo-Fly.

"Am he so very comical?"

"No; larfing to tink dat he put de water on de stairs."

The sudden arrival in their midst of a double-breasted comet could not have produced much more excitement than this reply.

"What's dat you say, chile?" was demanded by half a dozen of the youthful tale-bearer.

"He put water on de stairs."

"Dat chile's crazy," said Shoo-Fly, struggling to get free; "bettah take de kid home an' put water on he head."

"You gib us a rest," said one of the deacons. "Chile," to the solemn little darkey, "how do you know?"

"I wanted a drink," commenced the miniature African.

"Might know dat all de saloons was shut up Sunday," contemptuously criticized Shoo-Fly, resolved to cheek it out.

"I wanted a drink," continued the other, "so I come out into the hall. Dat boy was standin' by de water-pail in de hall."

"Nebber saw a water-pail," protested Shoo-Fly.

"Bimeby he picked it up."

"De hall or de water-pail?"

"He tuk it into his hands."

"Shuah it wasn't my feet."

"And frowed it all down de stairs."

"Lawd a massy!" howled Shoo-Fly, "dat's a ter'ble lie; ought to gib a chromo away wid it. Golly, if I was dat boy I'd be skeared to death fo' fear dat I'd git hit by de lightning. Dat kid ought to go an' write a dime novel, dat he ought."

The mother of the solemn little darkey grabbed him by the wool.

"Hannibal Sweetoil," said she, "are you telling de trufe? If you ain't I'll skin you alive!"

"Mote as well begin de skunning now," advised Shoo-Fly.

"You shut up!" was the fierce response. "I kin manage my own chillun."

"Spect dat I'd want 'bout two dollars a day fo' to be your chile," pleasantly said Shoo-Fly, who could not keep his tongue still.

The angry mother gave Shoo-Fly a slap that capsized his precious high hat, and grabbed her offspring by the neck.

"Ise'll bet dis yearf against a pint ob 'lasses dat my boy speaks de trufe," she said.

"Den what oughter be done to de villain ob a Shoo-Fly?" gravely asked a grey-wooled patriarch.

"Kill him!"

"Haug him!"

"Shoot him!"

"Cut him wid a razor!"

"Club de nigger!"

"Burn him alive!"

"Chuck him in de mill-pond!" responded the angry victims of his joke.

"I've done nuffin'," pleaded Shoo-Fly. "Jess wait till I catch dat little nigger alone. Golly, I'll bust de whole year off ob him."

Public opinion was divided for awhile.

Some sided with Shoo-Fly.

The majority didn't.

Opinions even ran so high that several fights were got up on the subject.

At last, a darkey who had had the only pair of pants he owned in the world broken completely up in his rapid transit down stairs, rushed up behind Shoo-Fly. Catching him up, he threw the little darkey up into the air.

"Give it to de young rascal when he comes down!" he yelled.

They obeyed.

Shoo-Fly had hardly returned to the ground again before he was boosted by a tremendous kick from a big, fat moke.

Then a wench laid him out with a big cotton umbrella, and the fun began.

It was a game of foot-ball.

Shoo-Fly played the foot-ball.

Somehow, though, he didn't take a bit of interest in the game. He wanted to go home.

Finally, after they had kicked and pounded him almost to bits, he was allowed to escape.

He slunk ruefully home.

"'Pears to me dat fixing dem stairs wasn't so much of a joke after all," he said, sorrowfully, to himself.

Of course the deacon heard about the racket the next day.

He questioned Shoo-Fly.

Shoo-Fly told a tremendous story about his innocence, and succeeded in fully convincing his master that he was an innocent and a much abused colored child.

The result was that the deacon bought him a new suit of clothes as a sort of reparation for the pummeling he had received.

"Virtue is five dollars reward," grinned Shoo-Fly.

Now you must know that one day a rough sort of a chap, who said he was a shipwrecked sailor, (shipwrecked off a freight car, probably,) arrived at the Betts house.

The deacon and his sister were away to a quilting bee.

Uncle Pete and Shoo-Fly were there alone.

"Wanter buy a parrot, shipmate?" asked the supposititious sailor of Uncle Pete.

"Deedy, what'll I do wif a parrot?"

"Yer married, cull?"

"Bless de Lawd, no."

"This 'ere bird will be equal to a wife. She can sing."

"Dat parrot sing?"

"Yes, sing. Poll, sing, you devil."

Thus abjured, the parrot, a little green bird with a general air of dissipation and deviltry, stuck its head on one side and shrieked:

"They all do it,
They all do it,
Blast their eyes,
They all do it!"

"How's that?" asked the sailor.

"Kin de bird sing hymns?" asked Uncle Pete.

The sailor scratched his head.

"Can yer sing a hymn, Poll?" asked he.

"P. D. Q.," promptly replied the parrot.

"Reckon he can't," said the sailor, "but he can be taught. That 'ere bird can learn anything."

"How much for him?"

"What'll you give me?"

"Fifty cents."

"I'm selling him whole, not in parts!"

"A dollar. Dat's a huge price for a little bird like dat."

"Make it a dollar and a half and he's yours."

After a great deal of wrangling the bargain was made.

Uncle Pete took the parrot, the sailor took the money, and everybody apparently was satisfied.

Uncle Pete hid his purchase from everybody.

He took the parrot out into the little house which he occupied down the lane, and began to teach it piety.

In a week the precocious bird could rattle off scripture verses, and shriek like a fiend over psalms and hymns.

Uncle Pete was delighted.

He finally hinted to the deacon of the treasure he possessed.

"Bring the bird up to the house Saturday night, and let Charity an' me see him," requested the deacon.

Uncle Pete promised.

That was Friday afternoon.

That night Pete went off somewhere or another.

And Shoo-Fly blundered into his house out of sheer idleness, and with a dim idea of playing some joke or another on Pete.

He had just entered the door when a shrill voice struck up:

"Hold the fort—hold the fort, I'm coming. Hold the fort! oh, darn it, hold the fort!"

"Wondah what de debil broke loose now?" gasped Shoo-Fly.

"Who's there?" asked the voice.

"Shoo-Fly."

"Then why the debil don't you make a light. Who killed Goliah? David with a sling—sling—sling! Who killed sling? David with a Goliah, no—no; oh, darn it! David with a sling—sling. Bully; give Polly a cracker."

"Youse kin suffocate dis lamb wid butter if dat Uncle Pete ain't gwine an' bought a parrot fo' to 'muse herself wid," grinned Shoo-Fly. "Next ting he'll be buying a trick mouse to ply wid."

"Who was the fust man? Eve; who killed Adam? Cain; hurrah. Hold the fort. David with a sling—sling—sling," croaked the parrot, getting his lessons on Bible events rather mixed.

Acting on the bird's suggestion, Shoo-Fly made a light. He gazed at the parrot and the parrot gazed at him.

"Nigger—nigger—nigger!" presently burst out the bird.

"Golly, youse know me," laughed Shoo-Fly. "Brace up, ole boy."

"Brace up," rapidly repeated the parrot.

"Chuck out your chest!"

"Chuck out your chest!"

"Have a beer?"

"Zwie beer," repeated the feathered fiend; "here's luck, boys. Drink hearty. Oh, hang it! Who killed Goliah? David with a beer—beer—beer! Darn it, no! Sling—sling—sling!"

A brilliant, that is to say, a brilliant idea of mischief struck Shoo-Fly.

He went to work and in about an hour had taught that bird as much slang as he knew or could make up.

The parrot was a precocious pupil.

He seemed to take a wild and wicked delight in throwing all his religious teachings to the wind, and talking bad language, though once in a while he would be seized with a spasm of remorse and rattle off his Biblical conundrums with astonishing rapidity.

Hearing Uncle Pete drawling out a camp-meeting hymn at a distance, Shoo-Fly skipped out of the back door.

"Good-night," said he to the parrot.

"Good-night, blast you," politely replied the parrot.

The bird was gifted with a superior sort of cunning, for it never gave itself away once to Uncle Pete.

When he came in it was jabbering away in relation to David and a sling with praiseworthy prudence.

"How am you, Hardshell?" asked Uncle Pete, for so he had named the bird.

"Well, God bless you," reverently Hardshell answered. Saturday night soon came.

After supper Uncle Pete came down after his prize.

He tucked Hardshell safely away beneath his coat.

"Hardshell, youse gwine 'mong society—gwine to shine in de company ob be first folks in dis yere town. Just you behave."

"Praise God," whispered Hardshell. "Praise David and sling—sling—sling, too!"

"Specs you know dat question who killed Goliah?"

"David!"

"What with?"

"A beer—beer—beer!"

"Dat's not right," said Uncle Pete, sharply. "Whar did you larn anything 'bout beer?"

Hardshell seemed conscious that he had committed an error.

"Sling," snapped he, decisively.

"Dat's kerect," said Uncle Pete, and putting on his hat he carried his prize up to the deacon's house.

The deacon, Miss Charity and Shoo-Fly were in the sitting-room awaiting his arrival.

"Here's de parrot?" Uncle Pete announced, taking the bird out from beneath his coat.

With a cackle of joy, Hardshell flew out of his master's hands and perched himself upon the back of a chair.

"I don't like the looks of the critter," said Miss Charity.

"Looks don't make the man," sententiously said the deacon.

"This is a bird," said Miss Charity.

"Well, feathers don't make the fowl," laughed the deacon.

"Dis am a remark'ble parrot, sah," said Uncle Pete.

"Got de fust prize of a wringing machine an' fourteen crullers at a baby show," put in Shoo-Fly..

"Pious parrot, it am," Uncle Pete continued, darting a reproving glance at our hero.

"A pious parrot?" repeated the deacon. "What next?"

"Specs I'll have to buy a religious pig, or a holy oyster," sighed Shoo-Fly.

"Don't joke on sich a subject, Shoo-Fly. What do you mean by a pious parrot, Uncle Pete?"

"Most ob dese parrots swear, sah."

"Swear?"

"Yes, sir, an' talk slang. Dis yere bird don't—"

"Nixey," interrupted Hardshell, in a cracked tone.

Uncle Pete looked a little astonished, but he made no remark.

"Show the bird off?" asked the deacon.

"Fust I will try him on de Scripters. Hardshell!"

"Yes," chirped the parrot.

"Who killed Goliah?"

"You!" blurted Hardshell, favoring Shoo-Fly with a nod of his head, as if to say: "Watch me, the circus has started."

Everybody laughed. Even Miss Charity melted into a frigid counterfeit of a smile.

"No," said Uncle Pete, "who killed Goliah?"

"David."

"Dar, dat's right, honey."

"Of course it is, you blasted nigger."

Uncle Pete looked thunderstruck.

"Dat's a nice sort ob pious parrot to show off," criticized Shoo-Fly.

"What did David kill Goliath with?" asked Uncle Pete again, rather helplessly.

"A sling—sling—sling."

"Shuah enuff. Now, Hardshell, who was Pharoah?"

"A rounder!"

"What?"

"He was a nigger—nigger—nigger! Nigger chew paper collars. Polly wants a blasted fire-cracker!" yelled Hardshell, evidently starting on his career of crime.

"Pharoah was a king—king of—" prompted Uncle Pete.

"King of clubs!" shrieked the parrot, plainly enjoying his master's evident discomfiture.

"No—king of—"

"Egypt!"

"Of course, you debil! What became of him?"

"Six months on the island, Pharoah," said the bird, as if sentencing an imaginary prisoner.

"He got—" began Uncle Pete.

"Drunk!" solemnly finished Hardshell.

"De bird am crazy," pleaded poor Uncle Pete. "Hardshell, you know dat Pharoah got drownded."

"Drownded—drownded—drownded."

"What in?"

"Grease."

"He knew it all dis afternoon," stammered Pete; "he am bewitched. Now what did Pharaoh get drowned in?"

"Give it up," affirmed Hardshell. "You son-of-a-sea-cook, order another bottle."

The deacon laughed heartily. Miss Charity did not quite know whether to be amused or vexed.

Shoo-Fly was fairly kicking himself with joy.

As for Uncle Pete, he was paralyzed.

But he determined to try his nice, pious parrot on another branch.

"Sing, Hardshell," said he.

"Sing what?" asked the parrot.

"Hold the fort."

The parrot ruffled his feathers, and stood on one foot.

Winking knowingly at Shoo-fly with its bright eyes, it began, with evident zest, to shriek out:

"Where was Petey when his wife was out?

Who did he kiss—and what was he about?

Look me in the eye,

Don't you tell a lie.

Where was Petey when his wife was out?"

The parrot sang this doggerel with such a relish, such devilish suggestion of knowledge of what he hadn't ought to know, and such a leer of suspicion at Uncle Pete, that that poor darkey was rendered almost speechless.

"Better sell that parrot to a beer garden," said the deacon.

"Or chop its head off," added Miss Charity, severely.

Uncle Pete made no reply.

He took the bird by its neck, and carried it out doors. Shoo-Fly followed.

"What are youse gwine to do wid it?" asked he.

"Frow it in de cistern," responded Uncle Pete. "It am possessed ob de debil."

"Give it to me," pleaded Shoo-Fly.

Uncle Pete hesitated.

"Youse'll keep it out of my sight?" said he.

"Yes."

"Den take it."

Shoo-Fly did.

And the parrot perched onto his shoulder, flapped its wings triumphantly, and observed:

"Let us pray, niggers!"

CHAPTER II.

As you have most likely guessed by this time, Shoo-Fly was always up to some racket or another.

But as he was a good worker, and made himself handy about the house, Deacon Betts rather winked at his fun, more especially as it did not interfere with him personally.

Uncle Pete was Shoo-Fly's favorite victim.

He was getting it, as a rule, all the time.

The following is a specimen joke:

Uncle Pete had very little wool.

But he was as careful of it as if it was long and luxuriant, and hung down to his waist.

Whenever he went out of a night, he would comb it and put hair oil on it, and scent himself up with all sorts of scalp mixtures and hair compounds until he smelt several degrees worse than a respectable skunk.

Shoo-Fly knew this weakness.

He also was aware of a second failing of Uncle Pete's—a willingness to try any new preparation for the hair.

So he went to work one day and got a quart bottle.

Into it he poured a mess of mucilage, liquid glue, gum arabic, and glass cement.

Shaking this delightful dose all up together, he borrowed some of Miss Charity's best cologne, and added that to the compound.

"Dat gibz it de reg'lar drug-store smell, for shuah," he delightedly said.

Then he tramped down to Uncle Pete's cabin with the bottle, tightly corked, under his arm.

It was Wednesday night.

There was a prayer-meeting up to the African church, and Uncle Pete, who was one of the pillars of the sanctuary, would be sure to go.

"Spect dat he's prinking—tinks dat he can catch all de cullud wenches. De old fool couldn't catch a one-eyed squaw wid a glass leg," said Shoo-Fly, contemptuously.

Sure enough, Uncle Pete was standing in front of the glass, combing his precious wool.

"What youse doin', Uncle Pete?" asked Shoo-Fly.

"Combing my har, chile."

"Shoo—youse ain't got no har."

"Doan't youse be too fresh; I'se got mo' har dan most cullud gemmen ob my age."

"You hab to comb youse head wid a map, don't youse, Uncle Pete?"

"What fo' I want a map?"

"So as to find out whar the har am."

"Shoo-Fly," said Uncle Pete, pausing in the combing, and speaking very impressively, "youse beware; bime-by youse'll git me mad—den I'm a bad nigger. Cut yer wid a briar, chile."

"Dat's all right, Uncle Pete," said Shoo-Fly. "I'se only funning; I'se bought youse a present fo' to pay fo' de parrot."

"Really, chile?"

"Shuah."

"What am it?"

"Guess; if youse guess wrong I keep it, an' if youse guess right I don't gib it to youse."

"Am it a red necktie?"

"You'd look nice with a red necktie, wouldn't you. Spectable cullud ghost you'd be. Ki, de kidnapper would catch you, shuah."

"Pair ob kid gloves?"

"I'se ain't a savings-bank. No, sah, or it ain't a seal-skin overcoat wid balloon-juice trimmings. It am ha'r oil."

"What kind?"

"Bottled ha'r oil."

"Dat's not de question. What denomination am it?"

"Youse mean its cognomen?"

"Yes."

"Professor Bolivar's Mexican ha'r oil. Prize wid ebery bottle, runnin' all de way from a lead pencil to a church wid a lightning rod."

"Shuah it's good, Shoo-Fly?" Uncle Pete asked, earnestly. "Kin it improve de growth of de ha'r?"

"Best ting dere is. Put it on a board and youse hab a hair mattrass in six days. Dar was a fellow swallowed some yesterday, and he had to hab his throat shaved dis morning before he could eat."

Uncle Pete didn't reply.

Probably Shoo-Fly's yarn took his breath away.

But he picked up the bottle, uncorked it and smelled it.

"Dat has an odor ob de bokay," said Shoo-Fly. "Bet-tah try some, Uncle Pete. Keep on wid its use an' youse'll hab so much wool dat youse'll hab to comb it wid a knife and fork."

Poor, unsuspecting Uncle Pete poured out a quantity in his hand.

"Gib it a good rub," said Shoo-Fly.

Uncle Pete did.

He put the stuff on to his hand.

He rubbed it on his wool with all his strength.

"Gib de scalp a little techin' up," advised Shoo-Fly.

The scalp was touched up.

About half of the bottle went into it.

Then Uncle Pete put on his hat.

It was a huge hat, about as muchly battered and bent as Shoo-Fly's, and it fitted tight.

"Gwine to prayer meetin'?" Shoo-Fly asked.

"I is."

"Guess dat I'll grip it, too."

"What fo' do a young debbil like you want at de prayer meetin'?"

"Uncle Pete, Ise a sinner."

"You spoke de bressed trufe dat time, Shoo-Fly."

"Ise would like to be good."

"Good fo' nuffin'."

"Nixey. I want to be converted so dat when I die Ise'll be able to hab a harp an' sit wid de angels in de reserved seats."

"Youse telling me a fairy tale."

"Nebber."

"Are youse really in earnest?"

"Powerfully."

"If I takes you to de prayer meetin' you won't cut up?"

Ise'll be as quiet as a goddess of liberty on a cent."

"You won't do nuffin' to disgrace me, chile?"

"Won't even breathe loud."

"Den you kin come."

Shoo-Fly went.

All the way he smiled to himself, and let Uncle Pete lecture him on the general sinfulness of his career without a check.

"Mebbe dat hat won't stick to his head, was what Shoo-Fly was thinking to himself all of the time.

They soon arrived at the church. Prayer-meeting was in full blast.

A big darkey was laying it down from the platform, and everybody was amening in the most approved style. Uncle Pete tried to take off his hat at the door. It wouldn't come off.

He tried it again.

The hat was firmly fixed to his head.

Uncle Pete's face expressed rather considerable surprise.

"Kin youse smoke segars here?" asked Shoo-Fly, looking remarkably innocent.

"Of course not," replied Uncle Pete. "What makes you ask sich foolish questions?"

"Thought mebbe it was a free an' easy."

"Why?"

"Kase youse am keeping ob your hat on."

"It won't come off," groaned Uncle Pete.

"Won't come off?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"Dat's de question."

"Mebbe it is a patent hat dat hooks on to your ears."

"Dat's craziness, chile. Spect mebbe dat de cold hab made it smaller. It will expand when I git warm."

"Shuah 'nuff; let's set down."

So they squatted down in a near-by seat.

In a minute or two Uncle Pete went at his hat again.

Apparently it was chained to his head, for it resisted all of his efforts to effect a removal.

"Lemme kick it," pleaded Shoo-Fly. "Mebbe dat'll fetch it."

Uncle Pete wouldn't, though.

The leader of the meeting had by this time noticed Uncle Pete.

He stopped in his discourse.

"Some folks seem to tink dat dis is out doors," he said, casting a tell-tale glance at Uncle Pete.

That gentleman never moved.

"Pears to me dat dere is a gemman hyar dat was brung up in a barn, an' was hid in de hay-loft when dey passed about manners," continued the leader.

Poor Uncle Pete fidgeted and grabbed his hat. But it would not move.

"Some folks won't take a hint, dey has to be hit wid a club," said the leader. "Brudder Pete Primrose."

"Well, sah," replied Uncle Pete.

"Youse hab your hat on."

"I know it."

"Why don't youse take it off?"

"Brudder Bladder," gasped Uncle Pete, "why doan't a pig play de banjo?"

"Kase he kaint."

"Dat's de reason I can't take off my hat."

"Brudder Primrose," sarcastically returned the leader, "am your arras paralyzed?"

"No, sah."

"Den take off your hat."

"I can't!" fairly yelled Uncle Pete, while Shoo-Fly wished he was out on an open prairie where he could laugh for a year or so.

"If de brudder can't remove his own hat," said the leader, getting mad, "dis congregation will furnish assistance. Mistah Fagan and Brudder Billy Bakecake will please to take off Brudder Primrose's hat for him."

In response the two gentlemen named, both muscular darkeys, arose and moved toward Uncle Pete.

Brudder Billy Bakecake believed in action rather than words.

He struck the hat forcibly, expecting to see it fly off out of the door.

He was disappointed.

He only smashed the chapeau and skinned his knuckles on the back of the seat.

"Hab you got dat hat strapped on, Uncle Pete?" he asked, somewhat severely.

"De Lawd rebuke me, but I don't know what in de debbil ails de cussed ting," sighed Uncle Pete.

"Reckon dat I'll fetch it off," remarked Brother Fagan, who kept a blacksmith's shop, and justly considered himself something on his muscle.

Brother Fagan was doomed to disappointment.

He yanked at the hat till he nearly yanked Pete's head off, but it was of no avail. The hat and the head were one and inseparable.

"I gibs it up," said he. "'Clar to Moses, I 'spect dat hat grows dar!"

Brother Bakecake also gave it up.

"De only way," said he, in an oracular voice, "to get de hat off is to saw de head off."

"Den Brother Primrose bettah retire from de sanctuary," said the leader.

Uncle Pete hobbled out.

Shoo-Fly followed.

"Nice muss youse got yourself into," said Shoo-Fly; "bet dat de hat will neber come off. How am youse gwine to sleep, old man?"

Uncle Pete made no reply.

He was literally broken up.

He walked around in that hat for a week, presenting a most comical picture of misery, until somebody suggested that he soak his head in hot water, and thus remove the head covering.

Uncle Pete tried it.

The result was that in the process of time the hat came off.

So did most of his scalp and all of his wool. Thereafter he went through life with a head as hairy as a billiard ball.

Probably he suspected Shoo-Fly and his "ha'r oil," but he never mentioned it, and Shoo-Fly enjoyed many a quiet snicker over the racket.

It was now winter.

The weather had been very cold and ice had formed rapidly.

One pond in particular was frozen solid.

It was called by the euphonious title of "Ducks' Pond," owing to a partiality manifested by ducks for its placid water.

It was also a great resort for skaters—particularly colored ones—for the most of the white folks went to a larger pond further out of the village.

One night Shoo-Fly discovered Uncle Pete doing up a pair of antediluvian skates in a bundle.

"Gwine to pawn dem?" Shoo-Fly asked.

"No, chile."

"What den?"

"Gwine to skate."

"Ki, youse'll be a nice lookin' ole fool on skates."

"Shoo-Fly, I'se a good skater."

"Good fo' breakin' de ice wid dat ole head ob youse."

"No back-talk, chile. I'se gwine a skating."

"Who wid?"

"De Widder Johnsing."

"Golly, dat yer face ob hers will break de ice."

"Don't youse make any criticisms about dat lady. She's rich, Shoo-Fly."

"Worth eighteen cents, all in milk tickets. Are youse gwine all alone?"

"No."

"Who else am gwine to disgrace demselves?"

"Most all ob de cullud society about. Dar's gwine to be a sort of cullud picnic down to de skating pond to-night."

"Oh, dat's it," said Shoo-Fly, and Uncle Pete passed away, leaving Shoo-Fly to his meditations.

Now Shoo-Fly had been treated very icily by his colored brethren.

They had unanimously expressed an opinion that he was N. G.

He was left completely out in all social affairs, was not

invited to any of the sociables or parties about; none of the girls would look at him, and altogether he was neglected generally.

Not because he was mischievous and of a reckless nature generally, but simply because he was "nobody's moke."

Shoo-Fly wanted to get square with them.

He determined to go skating all by himself, and see if he could not revenge himself in some way on the supercilious and stuck-up nigs who scorned him.

He had a pair of skates.

They were prize skates.

One of them stuck up in a sort of hoop, and the other stuck down straight. They weren't mates, and they were too big for him in every way, but still they were skates, and Shoo-Fly was as contented with them as if they were gold-plated and came in a velvet box.

With them tucked snugly under his arm he went to the pond.

It was crowded.

The elite of the colored folks for miles around were there.

Gallus darkies with red neckties and imitation seal-skin caps, escorted nifty wenches in highly colored dresses and dizzy bonnets.

They made fun of Shoo-Fly.

He was considered a fair target at which to shoot their verbal shafts of supposed wit.

"What is dis?" asked one.

"Dat am Noah," replied a second. "De ark tripped him out."

"Wher'd he git de skates?"

"He got dem at a raffle."

"Found dem in de rag-bag."

"Bought dem two fo' a cent apiece."

"Spects he wants de 'ole pond to glide about wid dem rafts on."

"Neber mind, stan' him on his head an' de skates will make good platforms."

Shoo-Fly paid no attention to these witticisms at the time, but skated bravely about on his own hook.

"Will youse obligate me by skating wid me, Miss Petey?" he asked, of a woolly-headed belle, with a nose like a flat-iron, and liver lips.

She looked scornfully at our little hero.

"No, sah; I don't 'sociate wid tramps," replied she, cuttingly, and several standing near laughed loudly.

"Dar's one cultured image to be fixed," reflected Shoo-Fly, as he skated off and fell head over heels over a cigar stump.

He got an opportunity to "be fixed" on the proud beauty very soon.

She and a sweet-scented coon went and sat down on a bench by the side of the lake.

They talked sweet love.

"Dis heart beats only for you, Miss Euphronia," said he.

"De affection am reciprocated," she softly murmured.

"Den youse am my ducky-bird. I'm your sugar-pet."

"I'm your lub only, your little mess ob candy."

"I'm your only Billy."

Then followed the sound of a good, long kiss.

Shoo-Fly had been hovering near unperceived in the shadow of some shrubbery.

The dialogue above named did not agree with him.

"Dat's enough to make a nigger sick at his stomick," he groaned; "'spect if I had a pail heah dat I'd frow up. Guess dat I'll spile de whole bizness."

Skating noiselessly up behind them, he yanked the back of the seat.

It tipped over.

All in a lump the lovers tumbled over into the snow behind them with more force than grace.

"Fire!" yelled Billy.

"Robbers!" shrieked Euphronia.

A big crowd was on the spot in a second, Shoo-Fly at the head, looking as innocent as a clam.

"What's de matter heah?" asked an old darkey.

"He kicked me over," said Euphronisia; "I've got snow all down my stockings."

"She upsot de seat," pleaded Billy.

"I didn't."

"Youse did."

"Youse a nasty nigger!"

"Youse am a big-footed wench!"

"Your mudder takes in washin'!"

"Your fader was a fool!"

"Youse nebber had a fader!"

That was the last straw.

With a howl of rage, Euphronisia went at her former lover and tried to fire him all over the pond.

He, in return, attempted to get her ready for the morgue.

The result was that they were separated and barred off of the pond entirely.

"Reckon dat gal mitebettah hab skated wid me," said Shoo-Fly, as he saw her slink off home.

Presently somebody suggested that all present go up to the other end of the pond, and forming a line across it, skate down hand in hand.

The proposition was eagerly assented to.

Everybody except Shoo-Fly started off to join in.

He didn't.

At one end of the pond the ice was weak and it was not safe to venture on it.

For fear some ignorant skater might get an unexpected bath there, a rope was stretched about a dangerous spot at a short distance from the ice.

Shoo-Fly, unperceived, untied the rope from the posts which it was fastened to.

Sneaking along with it in the shadow of the surrounding bank he tied one end of it to a tree.

Then with the other in his hand he skated across the pond, dragging the rope behind him.

The darkeys had joined hands.

They were coming down the pond laughing and having lots of fun.

Now was Shoo-Fly's chance.

He waited until the merry line of skaters was only a few feet off.

Then he suddenly drew the rope taut.

The darkeys saw their danger but could not help themselves, for they were going too fast.

All together they tumbled over the rope, screaming and yelling, and giving a living exhibition of legs and feet as they floundered down on to the ice.

CHAPTER IV.

SUCH a howling and screeching and general scene of confusion as ensued as the negroes went over that rope.

It was as good as a circus, and left a balloon ascension way into the shade.

Everybody was gabbing at once.

"Brudder Clamswill am killed!"

"My leg's broke!"

"Dar's a pair of sebenty cent skates all busted!"

"Some nigger stuck an umbrella way down my froat."

"Oh, glory, my eye's out!"

"Who hit me wid dat brick?"

"Golly, I'se half way down in de ice."

A council of war was immediately held.

Shoo-Fly in the meanwhile was hid safely, as he supposed, behind a tree.

"Gemm'en an' ladies," said a very important moke, who had struck square into his hat, and was apparently fixed into it for life, "dis am an outrage."

"Dat's so," corroborated everybody.

"Who put de rope dar?" continued the spokesman.

Nobody seemed to know.

They had all been so engrossed in their skating that they had not noticed the rope until they had fallen over it.

"It wasn't dar dis afternoon," said a stupid-looking darkey.

"Spect dat it wasn't dar last summer, either," snapped his wife, who had got slush all over her striped stockings and wasn't feeling very amiable.

"Dat rope was put dar on purpose."

Uncle Pete came to the front at this juncture.

Uncle Pete had cracked his venerable old head, had got his store teeth jammed down his throat, and had got hit on the nose with a boot heel.

His head was done up in his handkerchief, and he was feeling as good as if he had just been kicked by a first class mule.

"Spects I knows who done it."

"Who?" came the general chorus.

"Dat ar Shoo-Fly."

"Where am he?"

"Jess bet, I will, dat he am hidin' about heah, somewhar, an' grinnin' like de debil at us. Dat boy am an imp ob Satan."

The crowd did not desire another hint.

A scouting expedition immediately started out after Shoo-Fly.

For a long while the search was unsuccessful.

Until a shout of agony arose from a dandy young darkey who was looking up into a tree.

He stopped tree-gazing and jumped about like a chicken with its head cut off, one hand tightly clasped over his eyes.

"What's de matter?" asked a dozen arrivals at the spot. He didn't answer.

He continued his hopping and skipping around, and howled like a fiend.

There were half a dozen explanations of his conduct.

"He am drunk."

"Got de kicking fits."

"Mebbe he seed a ghost."

"Spasms."

"De wind colic."

"Ki! mebbe he's took pisen."

But the young darkey was brought to himself by a blow over the head from a stout umbrella, which nearly knocked him over.

A fat old wench wielded the umbrella, and she was his mother.

"See here, John William Henry," she yelled, "jess youse stop dat foolishness. Dis yere ain't a menagerie, and youse ain't a monkey. What's de matter wid youse?"

"He spit tobacco juice into my eyes," moaned the sufferer.

"Why don't youse cut him wid youse razor?"

"Kean't."

"Why not."

"He's up de tree"

"Den go up after him. I'se ashamed ob youse—ain't youse got no spunk, you good-for-nuffin' yaller fool?"

"He says dat he's got a hoss-pistol big as a barn," sobbed the sufferer.

All eyes by this time were gazing up into the tree.

A small negro, with a big high hat, could be discerned sitting very comfortably on a branch.

"Shoo-Fly!" gasped Uncle Pete.

"I'se ain't in," calmly replied that young gentleman.

"Send around to-morrow mornin'."

There was a universal howl of execration went up in the air as the darkeys below recognized our hero.

"Come down," invited half a dozen.

"Kean't," replied Shoo-Fly. "I'se hired dis flat fo' six months; 'sides, de wind hab blowed de front stairs down."

"What fo' did you spit in my son's eye?" demanded the fat wench with the umbrella.

"Where your son?" asked Shoo-Fly.

"Right heah—de poo' chile am most dead."

"Den hit him wid de umbrella an' finish him. Is he your son?"

"He am."

"I'd nebber gib it away if I was you. I'se sorry fo' you, 'deed I is, ole lady."

The old wench was all worked up by this more sarcastic than complimentary dialogue.

She wanted to get her fingers in Shoo-Fly's wool the worst way.

"Jess you come down heah till I talk to you," she wailed.

"Rig up a telephone," answered Shoo-Fly. "Dar will be more tone about dat."

The old girl began to dance around as her son had been doing the previous minute.

"Jess lemme hit dat sassy brat wid dis umbrella," she pleaded. "I'se 'll knock him stiff!"

"Dat's a berry nice break-down. Somebody get a banjo for the 'spectable female elephant," requested Shoo-Fly.

The old girl got fairly inarticulate with rage, and several friends carried her off to reason with her.

"Jess dump de ole daisy in de riber an' let her freeze ober till she gets cool," Shoo-Fly counselled from the tree.

"See heah, Shoo-Fly," said Uncle Pete, "did youse put dat 'ere rope across de pond?"

Shoo-Fly pretended not to recognize him.

"What's dat ting wid its head done up in a rag?" he asked. "Are it alibe?"

"Dat's Uncle Primrose," a voice replied.

"Oh, halloo, Uncle Pete, how is you?" asked Shoo-Fly.

"I'se all broke up, yer young debbil."

"Been skating on youse head?"

"Chile, I doan't desire any ob dis fooling," sternly said Uncle Pete; "did you put dat rope across de pond?"

"Nebber saw no rope," answered Shoo-Fly, in a very innocent tone. "Mebbe it caught fast to my skates, dough."

"I saw Shoo-Fly hold de rope across de pond," said a young colored belle, who wasn't as beautiful as she had been a short time before, for the rope had made her mouth several inches larger than it had previously been.

"Wouldn't take dat gal's word fo' a pint ob peanuts. She steals eggs an' buries dem away in her mouth," charged Shoo-Fly.

This allusion to the extensiveness of the young lady's hash-receiver got her dander up.

She, too, desired to actively assist in getting Shoo-Fly ready for a first-class grave.

Strange to say, most of the darkeys preferred to believe the young lady's word to that of Shoo-Fly.

"Jess youse come down yere out ob dat tree," cried half a dozen.

"I'se berry comfortable whar I is."

"Come down, do youse hear?"

"Postal keards an' register letters kin be addressed to me, kare ob dis tree fo' de next week," politely replied Shoo-Fly; "jess you folk go 'bout your bizness, I want to go to sleep."

"I'll get a gun and shoot him off," threatened a bad nigger.

"Youse got a gun?" asked Shoo-Fly.

"Yes, sah."

"Whar did youse stole it?"

"It's my own; I'll put a charge of shot into your hide, chile."

"Go 'way dar; gib us de rest in a pail. Youse skeered to fire off a gun; jess you go home, will youse?"

There didn't seem to be any probability of Shoo-Fly's getting out of the tree on his own account.

A council of war was held.

Various propositions came up for the purpose of ejecting our hero from his refuge.

One proposed to cut the tree down.

Another to burn it up.

But there was a lack of feasibility about all of the proposed methods that nullified acceptance.

The question was settled, though, very suddenly.

In a totally unexpected manner.

Shoo-Fly had been watching the meeting beneath him with great interest.

In order to view the deliberations more closely, he had climbed out onto a limb.

The limb was weak.

Shoo-Fly was heavy. His skates, alone, weighed in the neighborhood of two or three pounds apiece.

There was a perfectly natural result.

The limb cracked warningly—then snapped short.

Down came Shoo-Fly, all in a lump, into half-a-dozen darkeys, who were eagerly talking over the subject.

Away they went in all directions.

Shoo-Fly landed flat on a particularly fleshy gentleman.

"Oh, Lawd!" he shouted, "I'se killed! De sky hab fallen down!"

Shoo-Fly did not wait to make any reply.

He jumped onto his feet, or rather tried to, and made a break for liberty.

His skates, however, were a fatal obstacle; indeed, it was a wonder how he had ever got up the tree with them on.

They caught into a projecting root, and over went Shoo-Fly.

He did not get up again.

For the simple reason that about a dozen assorted mokes of all weights sat down on him.

"Now we'se got de debil!" victoriously cried one.

"What's I done?" squeaked Shoo-Fly.

"Dat chile's sass is too much. Hit him in de mouf wid a shoe!" snorted the old wench with the umbrella.

"Somebody swaller dat ole gal," requested Shoo-Fly.

"Shut up, or I'll cram de umbrella down youse froat, an' open it," she snapped back.

Meanwhile, a second council was being held as to what Shoo-Fly's fate would be.

His innocence in the rope racket was not believed for a cent.

"Shoot him!"

"Hang him to de tree wid a suspender!"

"Choke de life outen him!"

"Kick him in de ribs!"

"Dis am a real quiet crowd fo' to be wid," groaned Shoo-Fly. "I'se ain't done nuffin'."

"You blinded my eyes wid tobacco juice," said the gallus young coon, who had tied a very gaudy red handkerchief over his injured optic.

"Youse nebber had no eye," replied Shoo-Fly; "seems to me dat if a couple of hundred gemmen would get off of me dat I would feel berry much easier."

"I knows what to do wid de rascal," suddenly exclaimed the old wench.

"What?" uttered a score of voices.

"Dip him in de well!"

"How?"

"Take de bucket off and put him on de rope."

The plan was instantly adopted.

Shoo-Fly was dragged to his feet and marched off for a short distance to a well.

It was an old-fashioned well, one of the sort in vogue years ago, and which may still be seen in some old-fashioned village, not yet susceptible of modern improvements.

You can see how it is constructed by looking at the picture.

The bucket was hastily taken off the chain.

Shoo-Fly was lifted in its place.

He was securely tied.

Made a sort of amateur bucket, as it were.

But his cheek did not desert him—it rarely did.

"Dis is sport," he said; "'spect dat I nebber had such fun since de cat had chickens."

"Am eberyting ready?" asked a darkey.

"Yes."

"Den dip de debbil."

Willing hands caught the heavy end of the long sweep, shoved it up, and down went Shoo-Fly.

Down—down, scratching his sides against the rough brick work of the well—down—down into the icy water at its bottom.

"Who!" he chattered, "dis am a nice time fo' to go swimming. De water ain't cold enough."

"Raise him!" called out the master of ceremonies.

The sweep was pulled down, and dripping from every part, Shoo-Fly arose out of the well.

"Got enough?" grinned one of the crowd.

Shoo-Fly had got his mouth full of water.

With great precision he squirted it square into the man's face.

He staggered back, half-stifled. "Fust time dat nigger ebber had his face washed fo' years," grunted Shoo-Fly, shaking all over with cold.

"Dip him again!" came the order. He went down for the second time. And for several more times, until he was nearly dead with exhaustion and fatigue.

Then they untied him and left him, with yells and scoffs.

Shoo-Fly went home ruefully, and went to bed in a not very forgiving mood.

"I'll get squar' wid de fresh coons," he muttered, as a sort of evening prayer. "I'll fix dem. 'Specs dat I will hab to hab a sort of private morgue fo' der accommodation. Fust dere's de fellar dat got spit in his eye—reckon dat I'll bust de whole crust off ob him. Den dere's de lady wid de umbrella—dar'll be a private funeral 'roun to her house berry soon. As fo' de rest, de nigger grave-yard will soon be full—hab to bury de kids on de fence."

Shoo-Fly, though, did not go in for revenge right away.

He was aware that most everybody would be on their guard for a while, and he would have to wait till time made them grow careless.

He commenced his retribution racket with Uncle Pete.

That respectable old nig was very fond of snuff.

"Shoo-Fly," he said, one evening, as they sat in the kitchen, "get my snuff-box."

"Where am it?"

"On de dining-room table."

"Dat am cheek," mumbled Shoo-Fly, as he went on the errand; "an ole skelington like him leabing his snuff-box on de dining-room table. Next ting he'll be leabing his shoes on de pianny, and den Miss Charity will kill him, shuah!"

He was rather long getting the box.

Uncle Pete grumbled about it.

"Bettah take a kerrudge de next time you go," said he; "mebbe den you kin get back afo' de close ob de yeah."

"If I was as funny as youse, I'd walk 'bout on my hands an' knees, an' jine de circus as a comic mule. Dar's your ole snuff-box," said Shoo-Fly.

Uncle Pete opened it.

It was a handsome snuff-box, richly ornamented, and he was very proud of it.

"Massa Calhoun, ob Souf Car'lin, gib me dat, said he.

"Massa Mud ob Souf Gutter," growled Shoo-Fly.

Uncle Pete took a pinch of snuff.

"Glory! it am berry strong," he remarked, suspiciously.

"'Specs it been in your stocking-drawer," hinted Shoo-Fly, a grin beginning to appear on his broad mouth.

"Shoo-Fly, youse—" began Uncle Pete.

He got no further.

A most terrific sneeze checked his speech.

The sneeze was followed by a whole platoon of others.

"Oh, Glory—kerchew! Oh, Lawd—kerchew! Oh, Moses—kerchew—kerchew—dam de—kerchew—chew—chew—!" cried Uncle Pete, as the tears rolled down his cheeks.

"Nigger in a fit!" yelled Shoo-Fly, shaking with laughter.

"Holy Heabenly—kerchew—cuss'de dog-goned snuff to—kerchew—kerchew—get me a drink ob—kerchew—kerchew—kerchew—water!" wailed Uncle Pete, flinging his snuff box across the room.

Shoo-Fly felt sort of sorry for the old man, and brought him a glass of water.

This helped Uncle Pete.

But he had fits of sneezing for fully an hour afterwards,

"Wonder what the debil ailed the snuff?" he remarked, as he sat by the fire with a very red nose and swelled eyes.

"Nuffin' much, you ole fool. I'se only put about a tablespoonful ob cayenne pepper in it—dat's all," said Shoo-Fly, getting out of the room at a lively gait.

CHAPTER V.

THE colored folks where Shoo-Fly lived were a lively set of nigs. They were most all members of the colored church, or belonged in its services and were continually getting up some festivity—charitable or religious.

One Sunday a fair was announced for the following week.

"Kin I go?" Shoo-Fly asked of Uncle Pete.

"If you are tied fast," was the reply.

"What fo'?"

"It am berry remarkable, Shoo-Fly," Uncle Pete made answer, "dat whereber you goes dar am shuah fo' to be some debility on de deck."

"Tain't me," Shoo-Fly said, in an injured tone.

"Dat's de mos' remarkable part ob it, chile. It nebber am you."

"'Specs dat if de stone-yard burnt up dey'd say I set it a-fire."

"An' dey would probably be right."

"Well, I'se gwine, anyhow," said Shoo-Fly. "Dey can't do mo' den fire me out an I'se used to dat."

He did go.

On the night before the fair he was in the kitchen.

Miss Charity was making a cake, a regular walloper of a cake, too. None of your little penny affairs, but a cake big as a wagon-wheel, with about a pailful of frosting to go on the top.

"Golly, dat am a scorcher," said Shoo-Fly, watching Miss Charity stir the ingredients up.

"A what?" she asked, breaking in a few more eggs.

"A scorcher. Dat yere cake's 'bout jess it. Ki, who's gwine fo' to eat it?"

"That cake is for the fair," said Miss Charity.

"De cullud fair?"

"Yes."

"What do dem niggers want ob a cake like dat? Are dey gwine to put de band on it?"

"They intend having a cake walk at the close of the fair," explained Miss Charity, as she vigorously stirred it. "I intend to present this to be walked for."

"Sho! dat's jess wastin' the material. Dem niggers kain't 'preciate it. I'd gib dem sawdust cake wid marbles on de top if I was you."

Miss Charity did not reply, and Shoo-Fly watched her nimble fingers prepare the mixture with admiration.

She had just finished and put the cake into the oven to bake, when the deacon called her.

She flew to answer his call.

Shoo-Fly sat still and meditated.

Right opposite him was a can of kerosene oil, just brought up from the village store.

He looked at the can and he looked at the cake, just visible through the oven door.

"Wondah how kerosene ole tastes?" he reflected.

He tasted it.

He made a wry face and spit very vigorously.

"Golly, dat's awful," he said; "bet it would make me sick if I took too much. I tink dat it would flavor de cake bully."

The thought was almost instantly executed.

With quick, active motion, Shoo-Fly emptied about half of the contents of the can into the cake.

Then he stirred it up with the broom handle, and shut the oven door to.

"De weather improbabilities denounce dat dar will be sick niggers 'roun' to de fair to-morrow night, if dey go a chewing up ob dat cake," he grinned.

Just then he heard Miss Charity coming.

"Grom Greenland's icy mountains
From Injy's coral strand—"

howled Shoo-Fly, at the top his voice, as she entered.

She glanced suspiciously at him, but everything seemed to be all right.

To his great relief she did not look into the oven.

"Kin I go to de fair, Miss Charity, to-morrer night?" asked he. "Dey wants me ter play de prodigal son. Uncle Pete's gwine to play de fatted calf."

"Don't lie, even in joke," said Miss Charity, sternly. "If you get all of your work done you can go."

Shoo-Fly did his work up lively the next day, and at night was all ready to go.

He was dressed up.

Very royal, indeed.

His chief beauty was a red necktie made out of an old flannel shirt of the deacon's.

Perhaps it was not so stylish as those to be bought at stores, but nevertheless, it was very tooney.

Shoo-Fly was very proud of it.

"It am berry hot," he commented; "'spect dat I'll ketch some 'spectable ole widder wid sebenteen or eleven dollars in de bank wid it, who'll want to marry me fo' my shape."

He was one of the first ones at the fair.

The colored folks had rigged out the basement of the church regardless of expense.

Evergreens and flags festooned the walls and stands. Ladies with toys, fancy articles and worsted work, were to be seen on every side.

A restaurant was there, too.

Shoo-Fly was one of the first customers.

He took a seat at a table, and howled, lustily:

"Waitah—waitah!"

In response a fat old colored lady hustled up.

"Waitah—waitah!" yelled Shoo-Fly.

"Hold on dar!" panted the old lady.

"Oh, waitah—waitah! Bring me a waitah!" implored Shoo-Fly.

"Shut up dar, or Ise'll bust youse in de snoot!" threatened the other. "Ise de waiter."

"Youse de waitah!" said Shoo-Fly, apparently greatly astonished.

"Yes."

"Ki! I thought dat youse was one of de tings dat dey takes chances in. What sort ob grub hab youse got?"

"Iysters."

"Am dey dead?"

"You be too funny—course dey am dead."

"Den bring me a stew—an' I say, aunty."

"Well?"

"Gib me a pink tablecloth wid ruffled edges, a napkin wid a picture in it, real silver knife an' fork, an' a gold tooth-pick. You heah; Ise high-up, I is!"

"Fust t'ing dat you know somebody will be knockin' you way down wid a club if you is so fresh," growled the old darkey, as she moved away.

Presently she returned with the stew and sat it down in front of him.

He looked at it carefully, for it was a typical church fair stew, more of a conundrum than a stew.

"Waitah—waitah!" Shoo-Fly bawled, hammering on the table with his knife and fork.

The waitress hobbled up again.

"What's de mattah now?" she asked, in an angry tone.

"Bring me a fishin' line an' some bait," responded Shoo-Fly.

"What for?"

"Want ter ketch de iyster."

"What iyster?"

"Dar am only one iyster in dis stew, an' I want to get him. Bring me a crab net."

"Ise'll box your ears if you don't shut up," responded the angry wench. "You is intirely too fresh 'bout dat yere stew."

"Dat's all right, aunty. Jess youse go freeze your head an' preserve yourself," grinned Shoo-Fly, attacking his stew.

In the meantime several other fair-goers had dropped in, and business was becoming rather brisk in the restaurant.

Everybody, though, was presently astonished by vehement and repeated calls of:

"Waitah—waitah!" from Shoo-Fly's table.

The old wench hobbled for the third time to his table, with fire in her eyes.

Shoo-fly was sitting cocked back in his chair, with a tablespoon holding a sort of apology for an oyster before him.

"What de debil do youse want now?" asked the old wench.

"Bring me some chloride ob lime. Bring a truckful," requested Shoo-Fly.

"You is clear gone crazy, chile," said the other; "what kin you possibly wish ob dat drug-store stuff?"

"To disinfect de iyster."

"Disinfect de iyster?"

"Yes. Dat yere iyster, aunty, been nabbed by de body-snatcher. Dat's de deadliest iyster I ebber did see. Glory, jess smell he breaf."

All the folks seated at the tables began gazing around.

"Phew!" continued Shoo-Fly, seeing that he was attracting general attention, "dis iyster wants a funeral de wuss way. Bring me a paper collah box till I berries him."

Just then the darkey who had charge of the restaurant hustled up.

"What all dis fuss 'bout?" asked he.

"De iyster's rotten!" explained Shoo-Fly.

"What iyster?"

"De one in de spoon. Smell de dog-goned corpse."

The other took the spoon and smelt critically of the oyster.

"You little rascal," said he, "dat iyster's all right."

"Youse been eating onions, an' youse couldn't smell a dead cat," remonstrated Shoo-Fly. "Dis is a nice hash-mill. Dey makes dere coffee out ob nigger's heels."

"Yer get out ob heah, yer 'sultin' ruffian," said the boss, lifting Shoo-Fly up by the collar.

"Got dogs in your sassedges—put sand in your sugar," taunted Shoo-Fly.

"You bounce," ordered his captor, firing him out of the room. "If youse comes in heah again to-night Ise'll cut yer head off wid a razor."

"Bad nigger—bite railroad iron," sarcastically replied Shoo-Fly, picking himself up and walking away.

"Ki!" he chuckled to himself, "dis is peaches and cream. Didn't hab to pay a cent fo' my stew. Golly! Ise got sich a big financial brain I'spect dat some day Ise'll riz to be book-keeper in a shooting-gallery if dey don't elect me president."

He strolled contentedly about the fair for a while.

All the usual attractions at fairs were there in full blast.

There was the gold-headed cane to be presented to the most popular gentleman, and the silk dress to be awarded to the most popular lady—at ten cents a vote.

The post-office, the grotto, the shooting-gallery, and the bouquet stand, presided over by a bevy of dusky beauties, also flourished and raked in the stamps of the young coon-mashers.

Shoo-Fly took all these in, and made himself an unmitigated nuisance at them all.

He got the wrong letter in the post-office, fell head over heels into the grotto and burst up the whole business, went into the shooting-gallery and put a dart into the cheek of the man who ran it, first shot, and pestered the life out of the bouquet stand beauties by persistently offering one cent for the largest bouquet present.

In short, he was enjoying himself finely.

Soon he came across a new feature which he had not seen before.

It was "Rebecca at the Well." The well was an old hogshead draped festively with a flag and a lavish quantity of paper muslin.

"Rebecca" was a colored young lady strikingly arrayed in a red dress and a blue apron.

The well was full of a mixture of water and supposititious lemons and a tradition of sugar.

This was supposed to be lemonade, and Rebecca's duty was to deal it out at five cents a glass, and thereby paralyze the drinker two seconds afterwards with the kicking fits.

Shoo-Fly approached all of this gilded splendor with his usual self-assurance.

"Haloo, Beckyl!" he said, cheerfully. "How are things runnin', ole gal?"

The Rebecca stopped in her employment of dealing out a glass of lemonade to a weak-eyed nig with eye-glasses, and regarded our hero with a strong stare.

"Who are you?" she asked.

"Go 'way," playfully responded Shoo-Fly. "Quit your foolin'. How's Jacob and Isaac and old man Abraham? Do dey still sell ole clothes cheaper dan any house in de city?"

"What do you mean?" gasped the Rebecca, while the weak-eyed nig seemed to be hesitating whether to flee or not.

"Ain't you de real ole Rebecca from the Holy Land?" asked Shoo-Fly, in apparent astonishment.

"Neber was dar in my life."

"Youse neber picked up Jacob at de well?"

"Sir?"

"Youse ain't 'quainted wid Isaac an' de gang?"

"I'se a Thompson street cullud lady, an' I don't sociate wid low trash!"

Shoo-Fly seemed terribly disappointed.

"I thought that youse was do gnuine Rebecca dat de preacher preaches 'bout," said he. "Youse ain't nuffin' but a fraud!"

"I'll hab youse injected!" replied the Rebecca, getting mad.

"Shoo! stuck-up cullud gal wid paper bustle—got holes in youse stockings!" retorted Shoo-Fly, pushing her into the weak-eyed nig, who immediately fell plump into the well, spectacles and all, and nearly got drowned.

While the spurious Rebecca was yelling and endeavoring to fish the unfortunate out, Shoo-Fly roamed to another part of the hall.

He cut up for quite a while in various ways, until a loud cry of "order" from the platform attracted general attention.

"Bruddern an' sistern," said a gray-wooled elder, "de fair hab been a great success, an' de committee tanks you all fo' de result. It hab been determined, bruddern an' sistern, dat de festivity determinate wid a grand cake-walk."

Loud and uproarious applause here checked the speaker. He waited for it to subside and then gracefully continued:

"To de couple—gemman an' lady—showing de mos' grace in de walk de prize will be a beartiful cake, de present ob Miss Charity, de deacon's sistah. De walk will begin at once."

Instantly all was confusion. Dandy bucks rushed to and fro, grabbing for stylish walkers.

At last all was ready.

Eight couples took the floor.

The rest of the crowd grouped admiringly around the edge of the room, leaving a clear space for the contestants.

A fiddler who had been procured beforehand, began playing the appropriate air of "Walking For Dat Cake."

Off they went.

Every couple tried their best to compete for and gain the cake.

Around and around they went, putting on the most ridiculous airs, and getting into all sorts of postures and attitudes in their endeavors to be stylish.

All sorts of critical exclamations greeted them.

"Look at Pete Jackson!"

"He's got de cake, shuah!"

"See Miss Budlime sling her hoof!"

"Watch de way Billy Cramps hobbles!"

"Lawdy, Mistah Diphteria an' Susey Chewmuch will git it!"

That was the style in which the eager audience encouraged the strugglers.

But at last it was over.

Mr. Peter Jackson and Miss Openarm were decided the winners.

The master of ceremonies presented Miss Charity's monstrous cake to them in a very flowery speech.

"Dat's a whopper!" exclaimed Miss Openarm.

"Tco big fo' to kerry home," expressed Mr. Peter.

"Let's eat it heah, an' gib folks some. Hand it all around," said Miss Openarm.

The suggestion was adopted.

Shoo-Fly fairly kicked himself with delight, and edged towards the door.

The cake was cut.

Miss Openarm handed it around.

Nearly all the participants in the cake-walk took a piece of the prize.

Two or three bites sufficed to prove that there was something wrong with the cake.

Looks of dismay began to appear on the faces of the eaters.

"What de debil ails de cake?" gasped one.

"Oh, Lawd, I'se gwine to die!" exclaimed a second, doubling up and dropping his piece of cake.

"Bring me a pail, I'se—I'se gwine to frow up!" confessed a third.

In just about a minute there was the sickest crowd of nigs in that room that ever was, while Shoo-Fly grinned all over at their misery.

CHAPTER VI.

THERE was a lively scene after that cake had been cut and tasted.

Nearly all of the eaters were sick, and they slunk away outside to relieve their stomachs.

Shoo-Fly was particularly happy.

He sidled up to a fancy nig with a red necktie and a white vest, who had put on an awful lot of frills at the cake-walk.

He was sitting uneasily in one corner, with a shaking body and trembling hands.

Evidently he was wishing that he had never seen the cake, much less ate of it.

"Know whar I kin git any pork?" asked Shoo-Fly.

"Oh!" replied the other.

"Some nice greasy pork."

"Ah!" groaned the nig, pressing his stomach with his hands.

"Some fat pork, wid de grease all a-dripping from it!" continued Shoo-Fly.

"Please go 'way."

"Or dar's soft clams. Nice, stringy soft clams."

"Yah! I want ter die."

"Oh, doan't. Come wid me an' hab some suet puddin' wid ha'r ile sauce."

"Yoop!" gurgled the wretched and unhappy nig, as he made

a bold dash for the window and emptied the contents of his stomach over a passing Tom-cat, greatly to the latter's surprise.

"Guess he's settled," grinned Shoo-Fly, as he ambled across the room to a darkey belle, also a cake-walker and a cake-eater, who sat with her head done up in a shawl.

"Lubly moon to-night, miss," observed Shoo-Fly.

"Don't keer for de moon," sighed the sick belle.

"De stars am exquisite."

"Doan't keer fo' de stars."

"Dar am a comet ober in de nex' lot."

"Doan't keer if der are fifty. Please go 'way."

"Am you sick?"

"Ise dying."

"Stomach shaking?"

"It's gwine right up an'down."

"Ise sorry for youse. Jess youse gwine an' get a nice lot ob raw iysters wid a Croton-bug fricassee an' kerosene ile!" suggested Shoo-Fly.

This was too much.

"Yoop!" exclaimed the colored lady, and she tottered over the door, and commenced to exhibit all she had ate for the last six weeks to an astonished rooster who had got lost out into the dark.

The episode of the cake-walk furnished talk for a long time for the village.

It bothered Miss Charity awfully, but to the day of her death she never discovered how the cake got full of kerosene-oil. Shoo-Fly never divulged it.

One day Shoo-Fly went to Bridgeport.

He came back with a banjo.

He said he bought it, but it was extremely doubtful, especially as somebody had a banjo stolen that very day.

Shoo-Fly took it out to show Uncle Pete.

Uncle Pete was in the barn, cutting hay for the horses.

"What's dat you got, chile?" asked he, stopping in his work.

"Dat yer's an African piano."

"Wha's dat?"

"A banjo."

"Shoo!"

"It's so."

"You ain't got a real bargerry banjo. Go 'way—you are lyin'!"

"It's de fac'," assured Shoo-Fly, taking the banjo from its case.

Uncle Pete took it tenderly into his hands.

"Golly—it's jess dat," he said, handling it lovingly.

"Gib us a tune," requested Shoo-Fly.

"Dassent," said Uncle Pete.

"Why not?"

"Ise a church-member."

"De banjo doan't keer."

"But I do. I promised de minister not to hab anyting to do wid sich wanities. Kin you play?"

"Jess a leetle."

"Den gib us a song."

Shoo-Fly took a seat on the hay cutter.

"Here goes for de segars," he said, striking a few preliminary cords, and then bursting out with:

De stars am shining in de sky,
Buy me a golden harp,
Gabriel's horn am up so high,
Buy me a golden harp.
De road am narrow, de gate am small,
De cullurd angels am mighty tall,
An' white trash won't get in at all,
Buy me a golden harp."

Chorus.

Don buy—buy—buy—buy—
Buy me a golden harp;
I've got my wings an' de oder tings,
So buy me a golden harp.

"Dat's wicked," responded Uncle Pete; nevertheless secretly delighted, for the love for a song is inherit in every darkey.

"Tain't; it's a song," grinned Shoo-Fly, changing into a jig.

A broad smile appeared on Uncle Pete's face.

"Stop it," he begged.

"What fo'?"

"It tickles me. Golly, I used to dance it on de ole plantation."

But Shoo-Fly kept right on.

Uncle Pete's feet began to move. A broad grin usurped his face.

"Oh, kill me," exclaimed he, "Ise too sweet to lib. Shoo-Fly, stop dat music."

"Kain't; Ise wound up an' de key am lost."

"Whoa!" bawled Uncle Pete, his feet moving more actively and patting time. "Ise a young moke agin. Ise a daisy. Ise de pet ob de yaller gals. Oh, scratch me wid a briar!"

"All hands around. Swing your partners!" bawled Shoo-Fly, twanging away on the banjo.

"Hit me wid a rosebud—Ise a week-old baby. Ki, smother me wid milk. I feel as good as a kitten!" screeched Uncle Pet, as he flung off his coat and dashed into a regular plantation shuffle.

"Go in," advised Shoo-Fly. "Shake up dem gravel-smashers. Fust ting you know youse'll be getting six cents a week and board yourself wid a variety show."

Uncle Pete was full of enthusiasm.

He hopped about with remarkable spryness for a man of his years, and got putting in fancy steps.

"Clar de kitchen! Ise ain't no slouch if I do have fits!" he panted. "Watch me frow my hoofs."

"Bully fo' de ole man; some mo'," encouraged Shoo-Fly, manipulating the banjo with considerable skill.

Suddenly two shadows appeared in the door.

Two exclamations were uttered.

"Merciful Hebbens!"

"Great Lord!"

Shoo-Fly looked up.

Standing in the doorway were Parson Sweetoil, the shepherd of Uncle Pete's flock, and Sister Pairaces, Uncle Pete's lady-love, both of whom were intensely religious, and considered dancing and singing worldly songs a rank abomination.

Uncle Pete, though, was so engrossed in his break-down that he did not notice them.

"Ise a hopping whale. Ise a cat-fish wif ha'r on my teeth!" he declared. "Ise a winged hoss ob de prairie!"

"He's crazy!" exclaimed the parson, while Sister Pairaces wept in her handkerchief.

Uncle Pete heard the exclamation.

He looked around now.

Then he made a dive into a near-by feed box.

"Kiber me up, Shoo-Fly. I don't want ter lib any longer."

"Such sinful depravity," groaned the parson.

"In one ob his years," said the sister.

"He ain't done nuffin'," defended Shoo-Fly. "What do youse two want 'round heah, anyhow? We ain't got no old clothes to sell."

The pair held up their hands in holy horror.

"Do you know us?" asked the parson.

"No, sah; Ise don't want to."

"Ise Parson Sweetoil."

"Ise doan't keer if yer was Parson Kerosene ile. Jess skip—we don't want no tramps."

"But I want a few words with my misguided brudder."

"Yer brudder got hung long 'go. He ain't 'round heah anywhere. 'Spects youse after de chickens."

"I will come in," said the parson, advancing.

Now Shoo-Fly's parrot was cocked up in the hay-loft taking all the sport in.

He concluded to take a hand at the game.

"Blast their blasted eyes—kill 'em!" he hoarsely shrieked from his perch aloft.

The pastor started back as if a barrier had suddenly risen before him.

"What's that?" he gasped.

"Oh, demnation, give me a razor till I go down and cut their throats!" Poll called.

The parson conjectured at once that some person peculiarly blood-thirsty was concealed up stairs.

He retreated.

"I'll call on my erring brudder some mo' seasonable time," said he.

"Bounce the sucker! Hit him with a beer-glass!" ordered Poll, and the parson retreated in a hurry, while Poll chuckled herself almost into a fit, and issued an instant order for a fabulous amount of crackers.

Presently Uncle Pete came crawling out of the feed box presenting a most pitiful sight.

"Am dey gone?" he asked.

"Slightly," grinned Shoo-Fly.

"I'se a mis'ble sinner, I'se a goner, shuah," wailed Uncle Pete, "I hab yielded to de debil."

"Oh, cheese it! Hab a can-can now?" urged Shoo-Fly, starting off on his banjo again.

"Break dat banjo up," requested Uncle Pete, solemnly.

"Won't youse dance?"

"Neber mo'. Take it out ob my sight, I's a lost nigger."

"Reckon dat youse'll stay lost," retorted Shoo-Fly; "dar ain't nobody keers enough 'bout youse to offer a reward."

"De debil's got me!" Uncle Pete wailed.

"Put him in the fire!" sternly ordered the parrot from above.

Uncle Pete jumped about half a foot.

"What was dat?" asked he.

"Spirits," assured Shoo-Fly.

"Dar ain't none," reassured Uncle Pete, trying to shake off his superstitious fears.

"Give him six months!" called out the parrot, flying down.

Uncle Pete made a grand rush for the bird.

"If I ketches you I'll wring your neck!" he cried.

Poll flew triumphantly up on a beam over his head.

"Ta-ta, I shall strike you with a feather," she chirped. "Go soak your head, you bald-headed fool."

Uncle Pete moved reluctantly toward the house, full of remorse at being entrapped into a dance.

"Dat Shoo-Fly is N. G.," he muttered. "Allus cutting up some debiltry wid de ole man. 'Spect dat if I ever gets to Hebben he'll come along an' steal my harp."

Shoo-Fly was generally up to some lark or another.

He had a great way of getting even with folks who displeased him, in a style that was not very pleasant to them.

He had one particular enemy that was a nobby, sweet-scented young man down at the village dry-goods store.

His name was Adolphus McGonigal Brown, and he postured for a masher.

He split his hair plump center, wore a white vest all the year around, had the highest collars that could be built, and was a regular "oh, George, I'm too sweet to touch" baby.

He had fired Shoo-Fly out of the store half-a-dozen times for various things, and Shoo-Fly wasn't the sort of a peanut to stand such funny business without a kick.

So it happened that he casually dropped into the store one afternoon.

Quite a crowd was there.

Especially half a dozen silly young girls whom Adolphus flirted with, and imagined to be completely gone on him.

He was in his glory.

"Halloo, Ace of Spades!" he cried, when Shoo-Fly slouched in, "who dealt you out?"

"Halloo, Clammety Clothespins!" politely retorted Shoo-

Fly, "who opened de cage for youse to fly out? Birdie hab a worm?"

"You're too fresh for a nigger," answered Adolphus, savagely, especially as he heard several giggles.

"Youse ain't fresh 'nuff."

"I'll bounce you out of this store, you black imp!"

"Don't; youse might muss dat pretty blonde wig ob yours. Whar did youse get it—in de grab-bag?"

"Shut up! do you hear?"

"Kain't; ain't got no change."

"I'll make you."

"G'way, George; Ise a bad little nig. Ise'll go out and eat moons, and I'll kill youse wif my bream! Why don't youse get a glass case ober youse, and go sit in de windy wid 'dese monkeys, ten cents a dozen, onto youse?"

Adolphus jumped over the counter and started to fling Shoo-Fly out bodily, when a burly farmer interfered.

"Leave the little rat alone," said he; "this is a free country."

"Dat ape wouldn't be loose if it wasn't," put in Shoo-Fly.

"I'll make you sick!" threatened Adolphus, raising his yardstick.

"No, you won't," laughed the farmer. "Just you go back behind the counter and cool off. As for you (to Shoo-Fly) put a stop on your tongue for a while."

"Ise'll be as dumb as a pickled iyster," promised Shoo-Fly. "Dar's gwine to be some fun 'round heah pretty soon."

Sure enough there was.

Presently the express messenger came in.

He was lugging a large box carefully done and tied up in brown paper.

"For you, Mr. Brown—one dollar to pay," he said.

"Where is it from?" asked Brown.

"Darien."

"Who from?"

"There's no name on the bill."

"What's in it?"

"Don't suppose that I looked—did you?"

"Birthday present," said Shoo-Fly, who knew that it was Adolphus' birthday. "Mebbe it am diamonds, or a steam yacht."

"Probably it is a birthday present," said Brown, with the air of a man who was accustomed to receiving birthday presents every day in the week, as he handed over his dollar.

Of course the ladies present were all curiosity to discover what the box contained.

"Open it, Mr. Brown," pleaded one of the fair damsels.

Adolphus took out his knife and cut the encompassing strings.

The tearing off of the brown paper discovered a white wrapper and a delicate rose-tinted note.

Adolphus hastily tore it open.

He blushed as he read it.

"Gib it to us loud!" requested Shoo-Fly, who, of course, had pushed himself into the front ranks of the lookers-on.

"Do," requested the ladies, in chorus.

"Really, my modesty forbids, for you know however flattering it may be to—to myself, it is scarcely the proper thing to divulge a young lady's evidently hopeless affection for my humble self, seeing—" rattled off Brown.

"Gib us de rest in a dipper," remarked Shoo-Fly. "Read de note."

Adolphus in reality was dying to do so.

Without further entreaty he began.

The note ran this way:

"DEAR MR. BROWN:—Probably you will wonder at my forwardness in addressing you, but I cannot help it. Your manly heart has overpowered my maiden coyness. Please accept from me a little birthday present. We shall meet

soon. "Good-by, ducky darling, with a sweet—sweet kiss, believe me
"Your daisy dumpling,
"MATTIE EDWARDS."

"Oh, yum—yum!" gasped Shoo-Fly, "somebody club the baby. Oh, Mattie, ain't you awful? Open de package."

Adolphus tore off the white paper; a wooden box appeared.

"Guess what it is," he requested.

The guesses flew around lively.

"A gold watch!"

"Sleeve buttons!"

"Pair of flat-irons!"

"New hat!"

"Pistol!"

"Box of perfumery!"

"Potatoes!"

Adolphus determined to satisfy their curiosity.

He pried open the box with his pen-knife.

And then was revealed:

A dead cat!

Not a cat that had secretly died, but a cat that you could tell was not alive by its smell.

"Great Gawd!" cried Adolphus, starting back in horror.

"Dat's a bully old bull-dog present," taunted Shoo-Fly; "de gal ought to send a grave 'long wid it. Shoo! she mus' be awful gone on youse."

"A blasted pwactical joke!" declared Adolphus, holding the box out at arms' length.

Shoo-Fly gave it a tilt that sent the cat flying in the dandy clerk's face.

"Put some of it on your handkerchief," he advised, as he skipped out of the store, with the dead cat hurled by Adolphus whizzing over his head.

Shoo-Fly had put the job up. It was he who had sent the box to Adolphus—only a white friend, a gay college boy, had written the note for him.

There was a big fall of snow next day.

Shoo-Fly and a lot of little niggers who looked up to him as a sort of leader, were out snowballing.

They were having a grand time.

Presently Shoo-Fly discovered a couple of tramps—male and female—coming up the street.

This was great graft.

"Get behind de corner, boys, and gib it to dem when dey come 'ronnd," he ordered.

The boys obeyed.

They crouched in the shadow of a building, and waited expectantly.

As luck would have it, Uncle Pete with Widow Pairaces were calling at a house just around the corner.

He and the widow came out of the door just ahead of the tramps.

Shoo-Fly saw their shadows coming around the corner.

He mistook them for the tramps.

"Here de come, boys," he shouted. "When I say 'snow-ball dem,' guy it to dem hot an' heaby fo' der New Year's!"

CHAPTER VII.

AROUND the corner came Uncle Pete and the Widow Pairaces.

They were conversing lovingly about some party which was to come off soon, when the intention was to present Parson Sweetoil with a pair of embroidered slippers from his loving flock.

"Dey am grand," said Sister Pairaces.

"Dat so?" asked Uncle Pete.

"De dead trufe. Dere am a pair ob red parrots a sing ing on a fence rail wid a leetle yaller dog looking up at dem."

"Dat am bery voluptuous. Bery am—"

Just then they arrived at the fatal corner.

Shoo-Fly was ready.

"Gib it to de tramps!" he yelled.

A perfect volley of snow-balls saluted the pair.

"Glory hallelujah!" cried Uncle Pete, staggering back.

"Hit dem agin—dey's got no frens!" bawled Shoo-Fly. The little nigs responded nobly.

A second volley rattled over Uncle Pete and crushed his fair companion's bonnet out of shape.

"Help—help!" cried she.

"Aren't we helping youse?" Shoo-Fly asked, gently dislocating her false teeth with a regular "soaker" of a snow-ball.

"I'll murder de whole ob youse," threatened Uncle Pete, dodging a couple of hot ones.

"Print it on a pie plate," answered Shoo-Fly. "Youse dog-goned tramps am putting on too much airs."

"Who's a tramp?" asked Uncle Pete, doubling up immediately afterwards from a slug in the stomach.

As for Sister Pairaces, she was in a dilemma.

"Fire! help! police!" she shouted.

"Somebody wash de ole chromo's face and shut up her mouf," requested Shoo-Fly.

An adventurous nig by the name of Cotton tried to do it.

He came up about to the sister's knee, but he was plucky enough to make a very bad pirate.

But his enemy had an umbrella. A big cotton umbrella—emphatically the weapon of the colored sisterhood.

She brought it down with a thump that made Cotton's skull see stars, and upset him, head first, in a snow-drift.

"Get up, Pete!" cried she, elated with her triumph.

"Clar de yearth ob all dese young debils."

Another flood of snow-balls upset both her and Uncle Pete.

Uncle Pete tipped his hat back. The movement disclosed his full face.

Shoo-Fly caught a glance of the familiar countenance, and dropped a hard-pressed snowball, containing a marble, a small stick and several pebbles, in consternation.

"Cheese it!" he yelled, skedaddling off.

The rest followed his example, except one unfortunate coon who got caught by Sister Pairaces, and had his ears nearly boxed off.

"Wha's de matter, Shoo-Fly?" asked Cotton, who had got up and headed the retreat.

Shoo-Fly grinned all over.

"Who do youse s'pose dey was?" he queried.

"Who was who?"

"De ole liver-lips dat we snow-balled."

"Two tramps."

"No, sah."

"Den who?"

"Uncle Pete and Widow Pairaces."

"G'way!"

"I'se a telling it with directness. Golly, what a beef-steak!"

All of the crowd had a jolly good laugh.

Meanwhile the two victims were disconsolately arranging their toilets, and brushing the snow off of themselves.

"Did youse eber see such audacity?" groaned Sister Pairaces.

"Neber," sighed Uncle Pete. "Heah am my best black vest, dat ole Massa Ike gib me when he died twenty yeah ago, all bust up."

"Who was dey?"

"Niggers."

"What niggers?"

"I'm almost suah dat I recognized dat yere Shoo-Fly."

"Dat boy is borned to get hung."

"Is'll hang him up 'gainst de wall wid a rope, and paralyze him wid a good 'cat-ob-nine-tails,'" threatened Uncle Pete. "Ise gwine right home to find out if it were he."

Uncle Pete did go.

Shoo-Fly, by a rapid transit on the runner of a sleigh, a

cut-behind on a wagon, and a dash through a field, had got there before him.

And Shoo-Fly was sitting by the cosy wood-fire in the kitchen, apparently studying his Sunday-school lesson.

"Moses fit de faro bank—Moses fit de faro bank," he repeated, in a sort of sing-song way.

"Wha's dat?" demanded Uncle Pete.

"Joseph had a coat ob many colors, hit it on de back wid an ole baked cruller," went on Shoo-Fly.

"Whoa-dar, chile!" ordered Uncle Pete.

"Daniel in de bullrushes wid a golden calf—felled in de ditch an' all the niggers laff!" Shoo-Fly repeated, seemingly from the book before him.

"Shoo-Fly," solemnly said Uncle Pete, "dat ain't right."

"Know it 'taint—it's de book."

"No 'scuses. Shoo-Fly, Ise has a word fo' you."

"Spit it out."

"It am a berry particular word."

"Den why don't youse put red ribbons on it, an' bring it in on wheels?"

"No tomfoolery. I want youse to speak de trufe."

"I allus does."

"In a horn. Shoo-Fly, listen to me."

"I is."

"Did youse 'sault me wid snow balls?"

Shoo-Fly's face could not have expressed more astonishment if a winged whale had suddenly flown into the room.

"Did I do what?" exclaimed he.

"Did youse 'sault me an' de Widow Pairaces wid snow-balls?"

"Is dar snow outside?" innocently asked Shoo-Fly.

"Ob course. Now doan't youse play simple. Was it you dat fired de snowballs?"

"Nebber set fire to no snowballs. Dey won't burn."

"Dat ain't de question."

"Oh, did somebody snowball youse, Uncle Pete?"

"Dey did."

"Who be it?"

"Dat's jess what Ise want to find out. Was it you?"

Shoo-Fly perceived that Uncle Pete was not certain as to his identity.

So he put on a look of gilded and high-toned guilelessness.

"I's been in dis yer kitchen all de morning," declared he, "studyin' ob de Sunday-school lesson. Jess tell me who it was dat snowballed youse, an' I'll bust dere gall fo' dem, shuah. I's wicked to de heel, Uncle Pete."

"Shuah it wasn't you?"

"Shuah, cross my heart; hope to die; take my oath on a bean bag."

Uncle Pete was fain to believe him; he had no positive proof to the contrary.

He left the room without another word.

Shoo-Fly grinned all over with his characteristic, copyrighted grin, as he heard the door shut.

"Dat was spreadin' ob de taffy on wid a shovel," he said, throwing his lesson-book away across the room, and doing a sort of dissipated double-shuffle.

A few days after the incident above narrated, Shoo-Fly got himself into another scrape.

A travelling showman, named Perrywinke, came along with a panorama.

It was a moral and religious panorama, he said, pre-eminently adapted to Sabbath-school exhibitions, church fairs, and entertainments of a highly virtuous class generally.

So the Methodist Sunday-school hired him to give it at a gathering in their church lecture-room.

The deacon was a prime mover in the enterprise, and on the night of the exhibition Mr. Perrywinke took supper with him.

The dialogue turned on the forthcoming exhibition.

"It would go much better with music," suggested Mr. Perrywinke.

"How?" asked the deacon.

"Soft music, suggestively tender. For instance, I have one view of the River Jordan. An unseen player behind the panorama might play: 'Roll, Jordan, Roll,' and softly sing it; the effect is immense."

The idea struck the deacon very favorably.

"There ain't any piano in the room, though," he demurred.

"Nor a melodeon?"

"No."

"Nor a parlor organ?"

"No."

Mr. Perrywinke frowned.

"Then we will have to give the idea up," said he.

"We might get Shoo-Fly and his banjo," suggested the deacon, with a laugh.

"Who is Shoo-Fly?" asked Mr. Perrywinke.

The deacon explained.

"Can he play good?"

"Excellently."

"And sing?"

"Like a bird. I reckon he knows about three hundred tunes."

"The very thing," exclaimed Mr. Perrywinke, enthusiastically.

"What, a banjo in a church?" horrified asked the deacon.

"In a good cause—in a good cause, my dear sir," replied Mr. Perrywinke. "Down at Diamond Hill church we had a bass drum and a tamborine, and nobody objected."

"Well," hesitated the deacon, "if it's all right?"

"Most assuredly, sir. Call in Shoo-Fly."

Shoo-Fly was called in from a vigorous attack on pork and beans in the kitchen.

He was told what was wanted of him.

"Can you do it?" asked Mr. Perrywinke.

"Dead shuah. Ise boss ob de banjo and a gold medal vocalist," replied Shoo-Fly. "Jess youse gib me the proper steer, an' Ise'll jess be de holiest ting about de show."

Mr. Perrywinke took Shoo-Fly down to the church.

And he gave him a private rehearsal of the panorama with the music cues and so forth.

"When you see my allegorical picture of Paradise, play the 'Sweet By-and-by.' When you see my painting of Paul, start up, 'Only an Armor Bearer,' etc., etc."

Shoo-Fly faithfully promised.

At last it came time for the exhibition to come off.

The room was crowded with the first families of the village.

Shoo-Fly sat ready with his banjo behind the panorama.

Mr. Perrywinke went out front, delivered a brief rhetorical flight relative to the extreme sanctity and moral goodness of the panorama.

Then he stepped behind and shoved in the first picture:

"Jerusalem."

Shoo-Fly played a brief overture and softly sang:

"Jerusalem the golden,
With milk and honey blest,
Beneath thy contemplation,
Sinks heart and voice oppressed."

The effect was fine and the audience heartily applauded. Mr. Perrywinke was delighted.

He rubbed his hands together gleefully.

"It wouldn't be a bad idea to hire the little nig altogether to have with the panorama," he said.

Everything went well for a time.

Mr. Perrywinke concluded to take a short absence "to see a man."

He left the panorama in charge of an assistant named "old Jake."

Old Jake was as deaf as a post, and couldn't hear a cannon a yard off.

He knew how to run the panorama, and that was about all that he did know.

Shoo-Fly by this time was becoming rather mixed.

His memory, never particularly retentive, had forgotten the songs for the different pictures.

Old Jake pushed on the picture of a knock-kneed young man in a pink ulster and no trousers, rambling towards a blue house in whose door stood something that looked like an educated pig extending his front paws.

But it wasn't.

The pink ulster young man was the "Prodigal Son," and the educated pig was supposed by popular courtesy to be his father.

"Prodigal Son!" growled old Jake, as a cue for Shoo-Fly.

"Dog-gone me if I'se ain't gone an' forgot de propah chune," muttered Shoo-Fly, scratching his wool.

"Music!" called an impatient voice from the audience. In desperation, Shoo-Fly struck up:

"When Johnny comes marching home again,
Hurrah—hurrah!
We'll give him a hearty welcome then,
Hurrah—hurrah!
De ole church bells will ring with joy,
To welcome home our darling boy;
And we'll all get blind drunk,
Johnny, fill up the bowl."

There was some applause, several exclamations of astonishment, and one subdued hiss from the front.

Everybody wore a look of astonishment on their faces.

Old Jake, though, imagined that it was all right.

He yanked on a painting of "Moses."

Off started Shoo-Fly with:

"Whoa, Moses! oh, Moses,
Dere goes the sheeney
Vot sells de ole clotheses;
Whoa, Moses! oh, Moses,
Dat's vot dey holler wherever I go."

The deacon, who was sitting in front, got red in the face.

"That Shoo-Fly must be crazy or drunk," he uneasily muttered; "where is that Perrywinkle? By Gosh, this is rough."

Old Jake next obtruded a chromo of "Daniel in the Lion's Den."

"He comes rolling home in the morning,
Gives the door the devil's own bang,
An' me heart is broke, God knows it is,
Since Terry joined the gang,"

sang Shoo-Fly, blithe as any lark.

"It's a shame!"

"Put him out!"

"It's an outrage!"

"Who is it singing?"

These and other audible cries of shocked surprise were heard all over the hall.

The deacon grabbed his hat.

"I'll go behind that panorama in a minute and histe Shoo-Fly," said the deacon. "Where is Perrywinkle?"

Just then Perrywinkle came into the hall, and scrambled down to the deacon's side.

"Big success—ain't it?" he said.

"It's a thundering shame, by gol!" replied the deacon.

"Why?"

"Shoo-Fly's raising Old Ned."

"How?"

"He's singing all sorts of slang songs."

"Impossible," gasped Perrywinkle.

"Just you listen."

A kerosene oil painting of Martha Washington appeared in sight.

Shoo-Fly's banjo was heard, and immediately after Shoo-Fly's voice, singing:

"She's a darling, she's a daisy,
She's a dumpling, she's a squash;

You should hear her play on the pi-an-a,

Such an education has our Marth' Wash!"

Perrywinkle made one bound onto the stage.

He nearly knocked down old Jake in his haste.

"You young devil!" he shouted, grabbing Shoo-Fly by the wool, "what do you mean?"

"Wha's de mattah?" ejaculated Shoo-Fly.

"You've spoiled the whole panorama."

"Tain't good 'nuff to spile."

Without another word Perrywinkle dragged Shoo-Fly to the back door and kicked him out.

"Dar!" exclaimed Shoo-Fly, ruefully, as he picked himself up, "I'se a heathen from dis day. Dat's what youse get fo' assistin' ob de chu'ch along!"

CHAPTER VIII.

ONE day the deacon discovered that there was not enough work for Shoo-Fly about the house to fully employ his time.

And as Shoo-Fly idle was invariably a nuisance, the question arose as to what should be done with him.

The deacon cogitated over it.

"What shall I do with Shoo-Fly, Uncle Pete?" he asked.

"Kill him," replied Uncle Pete, without a moment's hesitation. "He am de wust young debil dat ebber I knew."

"I shall send him to school," at last determined the deacon.

"De good Laud pity de school," peevishly exclaimed Uncle Pete, with a shake of his head.

Shoo-Fly was called.

He was informed that on the next day he should go to school.

He didn't care.

He announced his perfect willingness to go anywhere.

The next day he went.

The village school was in session when he arrived outside.

Mr. Thwacker, the teacher, had just got up to give out the morning hymn, when a brick flew through the window and landed clean ker-flump on his desk.

He sprang back with great agility for his age.

"Who done that?" he asked.

He had hardly got the word out of his mouth when a big boy with a big head, a big watch chain and big clothes, uttered a yell as if a Comanche Indian had suddenly scalped him.

"Oh, my!" he shouted.

"What ails you, Stevie?" asked Mr. Thwacker; for Steven was the son of the richest man in the village, and, consequently, was the master's favorite.

"Ow—ouch!" bawled Stevie, "somebody struck me."

"Somebody struck you?"

"Yes, sir."

"What with?"

"A snow-ball. They opened the door and fired it in. Oh, I want to go home—it's all down my neck, and I know I shall catch the croup."

"Did any scholar see who it was that hit Stevie?" asked Mr. Thwacker.

"Yes, sir," chorused half a dozen.

"Who was it?"

"Shoo-Fly, sir."

Now the teacher was not on personal terms with Shoo-Fly.

"Who's Shoo-Fly?" asked he.

"Deacon Hoyt's little nigger," replied half a dozen.

Just here another interruption occurred.

A boy came pitching through the door as if he had been shot out of a cannon.

He rolled over on the floor; upset a bench of little girls, and was finally picked up with great difficulty.

There was a beautiful ring of black around the boy's eye, and his head and the upper part of his body was dripping wet.

Mr. Thwacker dragged him up by the collar.

"Ezra Dobbs," said he, "what do you mean by coming in in such a disgraceful style?"

"Tain't my fault," glared Ezra, defiantly.

"Whose is it?"

"Shoo-Fly. I'll get our hired man to kill him."

"What did he do?"

"He was outside," sniveled Ezra, "a swimming of a cat in the water-pail. I told him to stop, and he up and blackened my eye and dumped me in the water-pail."

Mr. Thwacker grasped his ruler, and started out of the door.

Evidently Shoo-Fly had expected an expedition of this sort, for no sooner had the door closed before the window opened, and Shoo-Fly made his entrance.

He gained a front seat by the simple expedient of threatening to cut the head off of the boy who occupied it, if said boy did not instantly vacate.

Therefore, when Mr. Thwacker re-entered, Shoo-Fly was one of the first objects that greeted his gaze.

"Did you throw that brick?" sternly asked Mr. Thwacker.

"Was dar a brick frowed?" innocently asked Shoo-Fly.

"Yes, sir."

"Sho! wondah who done it? Did it hurt de brick much?"

"That is not the question. Did you do it?"

"Nebber seed de brick, sah."

Mr. Thwacker determined to try another tack.

"What made you hit Steve Reynolds with the snowball?" he asked.

"What snowball?" asked Shoo-Fly, in return.

"Did you throw it?"

"My right arm par'lyzed. I kain't throw wid de left, kin I?"

"You did, nevertheless."

"Youse kain't prove it," said Shoo-Fly, cunningly.

Mr. Thwacker couldn't.

So he went for Shoo-Fly upon the assault and attempted drowning of Ezra Dobbs.

Shoo-Fly acknowledged the offense.

"Dat yer boy come along and he called out:

"Nigger—nigger neber die,
Black face and chiney eye,"

and," went on Shoo-Fly, "I'se up and biffed him. If ole Moses hisself should come along in a golden chariot wid angel wings on de back an' say dat I'd bust up de whole turnout, shuah! I'se a bad, die-in-a-cellar-nigger dat way."

Mr. Thwacker owned that Shoo-Fly had received provocation.

"But what made you swim the cat in the water pail?" he queried.

"'Twasn't a cat," said Shoo-Fly.

"'Twas," interrupted Ezra Dobbs.

"Kin I jess black dat boy's oder eye, so dat dey both will match?" asked Shoo-Fly.

"No," replied Mr. Thwacker; "if it wasn't a cat that you were swimming in the pail, what was it?"

"Kitten," solemnly acknowledged Shoo-Fly; "it hadn't growed up to be a cat yet."

A general giggle ran around the school, and Mr.

Thwacker ordered Shoo-Fly to sit down till the opening exercises were over.

Shoo-Fly obeyed.

A hymn was sung, and then every scholar repeated a verse of some scriptural or moral character.

All had essayed one, when Shoo-Fly arose.

"I know a verse," said he.

"Repeat it," said Mr. Thwacker.

"How doth the little crocodile,
Improb'e each shining minute,
An' scratch his head de whole day long,
Because dere's millions in it,"

bawled out Shoo-Fly at the top of his voice.

Mr. Thwacker with difficulty smothered a laugh, and called Shoo-Fly up to his desk.

"Ever been to school before?" he asked.

"Been in de jail," was Shoo-Fly's ready answer.

"What do you know?"

"I'se come to de skule to find out."

Mr. Thwacker pulled up a history.

"Who discovered America?" he exclaimed.

"Moses?"

"Who invaded England?"

"Daniel in the Lion's Den."

"Who was Joan of Arc?"

"Specs she didn't lib in our block," answered Shoo Fly, scratching his wool.

"Your history does not amount to much," smiled Mr. Thwacker. "Spell cow."

"B-u-ll—cow."

"Spell horse."

"N-a-g—horse."

"Your spelling is as bad as your history. Take the book, and sit down in the corner studying this spelling lesson."

Shoo-Fly took the book and retreated to a stool in the corner.

It was a most remarkable thing, but he had not been there five minutes before a spelling-class in front of him sat down in their seats.

They arose, however, with phenomenal alacrity and earnest yells.

"Somebody," wailed the head boy, "stuck pins in the bench."

"Who did it?"

"Shoo-Fly!" cried out a white-headed little girl.

"B-a-t—codfish, b-a-g—whale, b-a-r—church, b-u-g elephant," spelled Shoo-Fly to himself, rocking away in his seat, apparently engrossed in his lesson to the exclusion of everything else.

"Come here, Shoo-Fly," invited Mr. Thwacker.

Shoo-Fly went.

"Hold out your hand."

Shoo-Fly did, and the ruler descended with a "thwack."

Mr. Thwacker was justly named.

Shoo-Fly went back to his seat in a swaggering manner.

Presently a terrific uproar arose from the white-headed little girl who had told on him.

She arose up with her white head blackened, and rivulets of ink slowly trickling down her face.

"Who did that?" sternly demanded Mr. Thwacker.

"Shoo-Fly," came the response.

"Did you pour ink on that little girl's head?" Mr. Thwacker said.

"Rather 'spect so, sah."

"What made you do it?"

"Jess wanted ter make a brunette out ob her, sah. I does allus hate to see a gal wid hair jess like a chicken's," excused Shoo-Fly. "Dat yere gal's folks will be proud ob her when she goes home lookin' 'spectable."

But Mr. Thwacker did not accept the ingenious explanation.

Instead, Shoo-Fly got a second visitation from the ruler.

"Dar ain't a bit ob fun in dis ole school," he growled, retreating to his seat. "Reckon dat I'll git some gunpowder an' blow de whole ting up."

Shoo-Fly went home at the noon recess.

He brought his parrot back to school with him.

Not openly, but concealed under his coat.

Arriving at the school Shoo-Fly took out the bird, and while the other scholars were not looking, hid it beneath his feet.

As luck willed it Doctor Zeruble appeared that day.

Doctor Zeruble was a great man on a penny scale. He had a large house, considerable money, was chairman of the school board, and lorded it over almost everybody, as the big man of a country town is apt to do.

Mr. Thwacker received the doctor with great obsequiousness.

"Won't you make a few remarks?" he asked.

The doctor complied.

He was a regular slouch of a speaker, but he didn't know it.

He had a delusion that he could hold multitudes spell-bound by the magic of his eloquence.

"Dear boys and girls," he began, "I did not really expect to speak before you this afternoon."

"Oh, shut up!" squeaked Shoo-Fly's parrot, incited by its malicious master.

The doctor paused in consternation. "Who spoke?" he demanded.

"Charley Molasses!" squeaked the parrot again.

"Charles Molasses, stand up," ordered the doctor severely.

"There isn't any Charles Molasses in the school," faltered Mr. Thwacker.

"Who said that there was?" asked the doctor.

"Billy Mud!" responded the parrot.

"William Mud, arise!" thundered the doctor.

Nobody stirred.

"There isn't any William Mud in the school, either," said Mr. Thwacker, almost trembling.

"This is most remarkable," said the doctor, glaring about. "Some scholar is trying to perpetrate a practical joke; some scholar will be severely—"

"Put the rest on the next load!" commanded the parrot.

"Who spoke?" roared the doctor.

"Take a day off and find out," replied the parrot.

"Who was it?"

"Nancy Lee—Daniel in the lions' den. Whoop, set 'em up for the boys. Double six, you sucker," rattled off the parrot.

The doctor got red with rage.

"Mr. Thwacker," he said, "this is a nice way to conduct a school."

"I'm sure I don't know who is talking," excused Mr. Thwacker.

"You should find out sir," said the doctor. "You should—"

"Spit on a towel and take a bath," interrupted the parrot. "Glory Hallelujah! Zwi beer—grip the graft," howled that noble bird of Shoo-Fly's.

The doctor grasped his cane and put on his hat.

"I won't stay to be insulted. Mr. Thwacker, you will regret this, sir," he said, going out.

And as he passed the door the parrot sweetly cried:

"Over the sewer, baby. Pull down your socks and don't get your feet wet!"

After his departure Mr. Thwacker called the school to order.

"I will give a bright gold dollar to anyone who can tell me who caused all this disorder," he promised.

As if endowed with powers of understanding, the parrot wriggled away from Shoo-Fly, crept under the benches to the school-master's desk, and cocking its head saucily to one side, looked up at him and chirped:

"I'll take the pot!"

A roar of laughter went up from the school. In a moment Mr. Thwacker saw the cause of the unpleasantness.

"Whose parrot is it?" asked he.

"Shoo-Fly's," responded the same old chorus.

Shoo-Fly, of course, was immediately waltzed up to the desk again.

And he and the ruler met for the third time. After which he was sent home with the polite intimation that the society of parrots was not wished for in that school.

Now Shoo-Fly didn't like these fights with the ruler.

Neither was he mashed on Mr. Thwacker.

He resolved to get square upon the latter.

Somewhere or other he procured a torpedo. Not one of those little innocent torpedoes which come five cents a pack, but a kind now prohibited by law, but very popular some years ago, called "The Union Torpedo."

He took it to school with him the next day.

Mr. Thwacker had a habit, when elucidating any truth, of bringing his ruler down with a thump onto his desk.

Whether by habit or design he almost invariably struck the same spot.

Shoo-Fly was aware of this.

While Mr. Thwacker was out to lunch, Shoo-Fly cut the baize covering on his desk, dug away the wood beneath it, inserted the torpedo and carefully replaced the baize so that not a particular observer could detect the tampering.

Pretty soon Mr. Thwacker came back.

He called the school to order and raked up the geography class.

"Shoo-Fly," he asked, "what is an ocean?"

"A body of land entirely surrounded by water," howled Shoo-Fly.

"Put on the dunce cap," ordered Mr. Thwacker, "and go stand up on the stool. Your head is principally composed of mortar."

"What is an ocean, anyway?" asked Shoo-Fly, getting up onto the stool.

"An ocean," shouted Mr. Thwacker, bringing the ruler down, "is—". There was a sudden explosion that caused him to start back as if shot!

CHAPTER IX.

MR THWACKER could not have been more surprised if a two-headed crane had emerged from the floor and commenced a song and dance.

"Bless my soul!" he cried, dazedly watching the smoke clear away from the top of his desk. "What was that?"

"Somethin' bust," informed Shoo-Fly, with a remarkably sober face.

"It was de top of de desk," said a second frightened darkey, who had dove down under the benches in a spasm of fear.

"Lemme go fo' de fire bulldine?" requested Shoo-Fly.

"Stay where you are," sternly ordered Mr. Thwacker. "This must be investigated."

He examined the top of his desk.

The marks of the explosion were plainly visible in the shape of burnt bits of leather, charred splinters and particles of the torpedo.

"Somebody put a torpedo onto my desk," answered Mr. Thwacker.

"Good Lawd!" exclaimed Shoo-Fly, with an assumption of intense surprise; "it am a dog-doned wonder dat we ain't all stiffies."

"Will you be still?" asked Mr. Thwacker. "Who did it?"

"Billy Fisher," promptly answered Shoo-Fly.

"William Fisher," called out Mr. Thwacker.

In response, a little nigger, with a head of wool like a disturbed mattress, got up and rolled his eyes indignantly at our hero.

"Please, thir," he lisped to Mr. Thwacker, "Billy Fisher done gone an' died de week afo' last."

"What do you mean by such a lie?" indignantly asked Mr. Thwacker of our hero.

"S'pect he done it afo' he died," responded Shoo-Fly.

"Do you know so?"

"Only s'pect so."

"Then why do you say so?"

"Jess like dat ar' Billy Fisher for to go an' do some-
thin', an' then try to get rid ob de consequences."

"Scholars," asked Mr. Thwacker, disregarding this
plausible explanation, "I have been the victim of a pusil-
lanimous—"

"Dey don't hab to tie a tail on dat word when it gets

one of you has played me a practical joke of a mean nature.
It was the act of a coward."

"Dat's de dressed trufe," emphatically assented Shoo-
Fly.

"Whoever did it, stand up."

Nobody arose.

"Mebbe it was de cat," insinuated Shoo-Fly, catching
sight of a pussy prowling around the back of the room.

"Probably it was you," pointedly said Mr. Thwacker.

Shoo-Fly did not hear him. He had discovered an ap-
ple-core in a pocket of his ulster, and a red-headed boy
near him with his mouth open.



"Jess youse take dat broom by de stable door, and welt de stuffin' clear out ob dis dog gone mule!" Shoo-Fly shouted. "Spects he'll go den!"

lost," interrupted Shoo-Fly; "it's big enough to find its way home alone."

"Shoo-Fly!" fairly roared Mr. Thwacker, "who is the head of this school, you or I?"

"Put it to de vote," wisely answered Shoo-Fly, with his hands in his ulster pockets, and his dunce-cap cocked nobbily over one eye.

"I'll lick you within an inch of your life if you don't keep still," thundered Mr. Thwacker.

"Kill me dead?"

"Probably."

"Dat's all right. I b'long to a social club, an' de boys will bury me free. Kin I hab a lilac bush onter my grave?"

"If you don't keep still I'll gag you," at last said Mr. Thwacker, in desperation.

Shoo-Fly perceived that he was in earnest.

And as Shoo-Fly didn't have an overwhelming desire to be gagged, he subsided for a minute, and relieved his feelings by firing spit-balls at a good boy in the back seat, much to the good boy's evident agony.

"Scholars," once more resumed Mr. Thwacker, "some

It became a matter of speculation to Shoo-Fly whether or not the boy's mouth was wide enough open to admit of the passage of the apple-core.

The more Shoo-Fly reflected upon the problem, the more did he desire to see it solved.

Taking advantage of a favorable opportunity, he slyly flung the apple-core.

Straight into the red-headed boy's mouth it went, to his thunderstruck astonishment.

He gasped and choked and kicked until his eyes bulged out of his head and his face was the color of a lobster.

The attention of the whole school was attracted to him.

"Put ice on his head—he's got fits," advised Shoo-Fly.

"He ain't," snapped a little girl; "you throwed an apple-core down his throat."

"Smarty—smarty, go swaller de grammer. Ho! youse said 'frowed,' yer orter said 'frew,'" taunted Shoo-Fly.

Just then the red-headed boy came to. He was passionate, as most red-headed boys are.

"Now, Shoo-Fly, I'm going to tell on yer," he said.

"What fo'?" asked Shoo-Fly.

"You put the torpedo on Mr. Thwacker's desk. I seed yer through the winder."

"He did?" gasped Mr. Thwacker.

"Yes, sir!"

Mr. Thwacker made a dive for the ruler.

Shoo-Fly made a dive for the door.

Out of it he went like a shot, upsetting three or four who got into his way.

Mr. Thwacker pursued.

But he was not quick enough.

By the time that he got to the door all that was visible of Shoo-Fly was his coat-tails vanishing over a distant hill.

That ended Shoo-Fly's going to school. For the present at least. And he felt happy about it even if Miss Charity did give him a tremendous scolding as soon as she heard of the torpedo exploit.

Uncle Pete, as you have already guessed, was the chief but of Shoo-Fly's jokes.

One Sunday night at the negro church Shoo-Fly racketed it on the old man once more.

A college boy visiting near-by the deacon's had a small music-box—one of those cheap, circular-formed apparatuses that murdered several tunes.

Shoo-Fly had expressed his admiration of the instrument very loudly, and upon going back to college its owner presented it to Shoo-Fly.

On the Sunday night of which we write, Shoo-Fly accompanied Uncle Pete to church, greatly to the latter's sorrow, for he didn't care for Nobody's Moke as a companion, for a cent.

Shoo-Fly had the music-box with him. It was all wound up.

All that it needed to set it going was a pressure on a knob in the top.

There was a revival in progress in the church, and it wasn't long before Uncle Pete took a hand in the universal singing, shouting and praying that was going on all around him.

"Brudders and sisters," he announced, getting up, "I'se a poah, mis'ble sinner. I is an abomination in de sight ob de Lord!"

Just here Shoo-Fly slipped the music-box into the speaker's coat-pocket.

"I is a failure and a fraud," confessed Uncle Pete. "De debbil hab catched hold ob me, shuah, an'—"

Here was where the music-box came in.

With a preliminary whizz it started off on "Tommy, Make Room for your Uncle."

Uncle Pete, however, was so engrossed in his endeavor to prove himself out a glazed old humbug, that he did not hear it. He was partially deaf, anyhow.

"Oh, I is de mud beneaf a good man's feet; I is dirt in de ash-cart," he yelled.

But the rest of the congregation heard the unexpected melody.

They gazed at one another with surprise expressed on their faces.

The parson held up his hand for silence.

"Dar's music in the air!" he called out.

"Somebody's outside disturbin' ob dis congregation wid a fiddle," said a brother.

"Sh!" exclaimed another; "dat ain't no fiddle talk—it am a pianner."

"Whar you 'spect anybody's gwine to get a pianner," asked the first speaker.

"Mebbe dey bring 'long on a cart."

"I tole youse dat's a fiddle."

"It's a pianner!"

"Fiddle!"

"Pianner!"

Some niggers got 'bout as much ear fo' music as a cow. Dat's a fiddle, take my oath."

"Some niggers got wax in dere ears. Dat's a pianner."

"Who's got wax in dere ears?"

"Youse."

The two respected brothers got up in their seats, and a quarrel seemed assured.

One of them put his hand on his pistol pocket.

Several ladies screamed loudly.

"Look out, Brudder Johnsing!" shrieked a feminine voice. "He carries a razor!"

Parson Sweetoil got down out of the pulpit.

"Is dis a church or a free an' easy?" he asked. "Brudder Simpson, sit down," he ordered. "Brudder Johnsing, if youse produces any razors in dis church, Ise'll lick you myself!"

Growling like dogs, the two muscular Christians slunk into their seats.

As for the music box, it finished "Tommy, Make Room for your Uncle," with a grand flourish, and glided into "The Mulligan Guards."

"Dar it goes agin."

"It's in the cemetary."

"De music am profane!"

"Tell de sexton to fire de music out."

"It's dog-goned wicked!"

Such were sample exclamations arising from all parts of the building.

Instantly a fat negro in front of Uncle Pete made a discovery.

"It's right behind me," he announced.

"Pears to me dat it do sound mighty near," said Uncle Pete; "Shoo-Fly, am it youse?"

"Dunno nuffin' 'bout it," replied Shoo-Fly. "Do you s'pose dat Ise got a whole brass band 'bout me?"

The parson stood up on a seat. "Who is it dat's makin' de music?" he asked.

Nobody replied.

But a great many glances were directed at Uncle Pete. The parson noticed this.

"Is it you, Uncle Peter?" he interrogated.

Uncle Peter was almost paralyzed with astonishment.

He clambered out into the aisle.

"Is I a two-year old fly-away niggah, or is I a 'spectable ole—"

"Fool!" casually remarked Shoo-Fly, while several about grinned.

Uncle Pete gritted his teeth, gave Shoo-Fly a savage look, and continued:

"What fo' do I want to come into de church an' make de music? What is I makin' it wid, my mouf? I hasn't done got nuffin' 'bout me dat plays a tune."

As if resolved to prove him a liar, the music-box stopped short on the "Mulligan Guard," and cavorted into "We Won't Go Home till Morning."

"De music certainly precedes from youah vicinity," said the parson.

"Kase you see a pipe in my pocket don't prove I'se smoking, do it?" Uncle Peter inquired.

"No, sah."

"De one am jess as unsensible as de other. Ise ain't no musical instrument."

"Deacon Deadhead, will you please fo' to intervestigate dis yere music?" asked the parson.

The deacon got up.

He was a solemn-looking negro, who might have been taken for a model for a gravestone.

He peered under the pulpit with owlish gravity, examined a spittoon carefully, scrutinized the wall, and gazed with supernatural wisdom into the baptismal bowl.

He announced solemnly that the music was not there, and then moved down the aisle to Uncle Pete.

By this time the music-box had switched off into its last tune: "Johnny Morgan plays the Organ." And by the way in which the music-box rattled it off, Johnny Morgan appeared to be playing the organ with fiendish glee.

The deacon gazed carefully at Uncle Pete's feet.

"Spect dat Ise got a parlah organ concealed in my shoe?" sarcastically asked Uncle Pete.

The deacon made no reply, but examined the rest of Uncle Pete's person.

"Oh, yes, I'se got a banjo in my mouf, an' I'se playin' it wid my teefe," growled Uncle Pete, growing restive under the scrutiny. "Pears to me dat I mote jess as well gib up bein' good an' jine de cannibals."

Without a muscle of his face moving, the cast-iron deacon dove into Uncle Pete's pocket and brought out the music box.

"Dar!" he exclaimed, holding it aloft.

A groan of horror and surprise went up from the congregation.

"Uncle Pete, I is surprised an' intensely horrified," gasped the parson. "You has come heah wid a music box, disturbed de whole ob de exercises, an' den lied 'bout it. De debbil hab cotched you fo' a fact. Uncle Pete, youse will please to git out ob de church."

"But," objected Uncle Pete, "I'se as innocent as a

"Dat'll do," retorted the parson, "we will heah de rest some mo' convenient season. De choir will please to sing de sebenty-sixth psalm, an' Uncle Pete will please to get out."

Sorrowfully the poor darkey did so, wondering how in the mischief the music box could have got into his possession.

"It must hab been de work ob de debbil, shuah," he mournfully concluded.

Shoo-Fly, of course, was happy over this joke for a day or two.

But he shortly after met with an adventure that was a sort of a revenge for his practical joking.

He and a select mob of the worst young darkeys in the village were out on a tramp one afternoon.

They were having a glorious time in their own estimation.

They had snowballed everybody and everything; made slides in front of all the houses in town, to the great delight of the respectable citizens who fell down on them, "hooked behind" all the passing sleighs, and otherwise enjoyed themselves.

Finally one of the crowd, the redoubtable Cotton, spied a mule which had been locked out of its stable, and was standing mutely with mulish patience by the door, waiting for some kind hand to open it.

This was a regular picnic for the colored brigade.

"Let's go ridin'," proposed Shoo-Fly.

This suggestion was instantly adopted.

The whole crowd piled onto the poor beast's back.

"G'lang dar, Karus!" ordered Shoo-Fly.

But the mule didn't see it.

He stood as still as if he was made of stone, and did not budge.

Kickings and poundings were of no use, the mule firmly and positively refused to start.

"Git off dare, Pete, and snowball de pacer," Shoo-Fly ordered.

Pete slid off and implanted two vigorous snowballs on the animal's stern.

It was about as sensible a proceeding as attempting to sink an iron-clad with a volley of gum-drops.

The mule stood stock still.

Shoo-Fly had another happy thought. He ordered Cotton off.

"Jess youse take dat yere broom by de stable door, and welt de stuffin' clear out ob dis yere dog-gone mule!" Shoo-Fly shouted. "Spects he'll go den."

CHAPTER X.

TON got down and ploughed his way through the until he reached the broom.

Meanwhile, Pete had favored the mule with another snowball, but the mule stood as stiff as if it hadn't any more feeling than a brick house.

"Why doan't youse take seberal days fo' to get dat broom?" asked Shoo-Fly, disgusted at the snail-like proceedings of Cotton.

"Why doan't youse get down an' git it yourself?" asked Cotton, stopping with one hand upon the broom.

"Bery good reason."

"What am it?"

"Dese yere Johnsing chillen right behind me on de mule—dey orphans. Bofe of dere parents are in de work-house."

"What ob it?"

"Spose dat while I waz gettin' de broom de mule would start. Who'd be 'spensible fo' de Johnsing boys? Jess youse done get dat broom in a hurry, Cotton, or I shall glide down an' make dem lyin' lips ob youse bigger dan ebber. You heah?"

Cotton evidently did hear, for he grasped the broom.

"Where shall I hit de old riddle?" he asked.

"Gib him a good welt on de rear," ordered Shoo-Fly. "an' we club de debil at the same time."

The programme was faithfully carried out.

The gang on the mule clubbed the poor beast unmercifully, and Cotton did yeoman's duty with the broom.

The mule stood it for a while. His thoughts seemed far away; roaming in the green recesses of India's jungles or in the icy caverns of the North Pole.

But at last he got aroused. An aroused mule is equal to about six boiler explosions in the amount of damage he can do.

In a minute the mule appeared to be all legs. And the air appeared to be all little darkeys. Away they went, in all directions, Shoo-Fly being fired square into the stable door.

As for Cotton, he got a kick that almost paralyzed him, and deposited him into the snow several feet under.

Pete also got a taste of mule hoof, and rose up towards the sky like an elaborate rocket, but came down again with remarkable speed onto his head.

If the stable door had been a little softer Shoo-Fly might have gone through.

As it was, he dropped down into the snow like a wounded whangdoodle, with one of the "Johnsing" boys on top of him.

He looked up at the mule.

The beast was standing like a graven image.

Its face was as sad and solemn as a sepulcher, and a thoughtful mist obscured its eyes.

Plainly its mind was with the savages of Central Turkestan, or among the vine-clad hills of sunny Italy.

Shoo-Fly got up.

He looked at the mule.

Then he felt of his head, and glanced with a puzzled expression of face at the collapsed state of the riding party.

Then he looked at the mule again, and that animal stared gravely at him, as if to mutely suggest that it didn't have the pleasure of his acquaintance, and didn't want to have.

Shoo-Fly scratched his wool. Plainly he was perplexed.

He stumbled through the snow, and pulled out the unfortunate and almost stunned Cotton.

"Wha'—wha' is he?" dazedly demanded Cotton.

"Where's who?" asked shoo-Fly.

"De man."

"What man?"

"De man dat hit me wid de club."

"Youse can't gib me no taffy," said Shoo-Fly. "What fo' did youse want to gwine fo' to do it?"

"Wha' did I do?"

"Knock us all off ob de mule wid de broom."

"Who did?"

"You did."

"Swar I didn't. Cross my heart. Wha' fo' did youse lean down an' kick me in de head fo'?"

"Didn't," protested Shoo-Fly.

Just then Pete revived, and he appeared upon the scene. He was sure that somebody had hit him with a brick, and he began putting a head on the smallest Johnson boy on principle.

Of course Shoo-Fly took a hand in the muss, and a free fight raged, while the mule looked on with a sad protest written in its eyes.

At last, after everybody was exhausted and nobody hurt, as somehow always miraculously happens in small boys' fights, although a spectator looking on during the progress of the row would swear that, at least, all but one would get killed, Shoo-Fly proposed that they get onto the mule again.

This motion was adopted.

The whole mob clambered onto the beast's back for the second time.

The mule appeared not to have the faintest idea of what was going on.

His thoughts seemed to be roaming further off than ever. Indeed, a bystander would have been apt to take him for a wooden mule.

The clubbing started afresh.

For all practical purposes Shoo-Fly and his pals might as well have got off and clubbed a fence.

"Wondah is dis alive?" asked Shoo-Fly.

"It's stuffed," said Cotton.

"Wid bricks," solemnly added the youngest Johnsing boy.

"Wondah how we can make de ole mule go?" queried Shoo-Fly.

He got several responses.

"Build a fire under him!"

"Get out an' push!"

"Rub its nose with a carrot!"

"Get a gun and shoot it!"

"No, I tole youse how," began Shoo-Fly, a thought striking him; "we'll get a—"

Shoo-Fly never finished the sentence. It is lost to the world forever.

For just as he was about to speak, Cotton, who was astride of the tail end of the mule, discovered a sore on his mount's hindquarters.

Nothing would do but that Cotton should undertake to heal the sore by striking it with the big bale stick he held in his hand.

That was too much for the composure of the mule.

He put down his head and raised his feet. He did more high kicking in a second than any song and dance man ever did in a week.

All of the darkeys flew in different directions except Shoo-Fly.

By some miracle he stuck on.

"Whoa!" he bawled.

The mule brayed stentorously, kicked ferociously, and tried to bite Shoo-Fly's feet off.

"Help fo' de Lawd's sakes, I'se a gone niggah!" Shoo-Fly screeched.

"Oh—oh! look at de circus," called out Cotton, revived by Shoo-Fly's cries.

"Kill de mule," begged Shoo-Fly. "I'se dyin'."

"Jump," advised Cotton.

"Catch hold ob de tail."

"What fo'?"

"Den he'll stop prancing aroun' an' gib me a chance to get off. Whoa da, you fo' legged debil!"

Cotton arose.

He made a desperate clutch for the mule's tail and secured it.

The mule grinned a fiendish grin and elevated both hind legs.

Cotton shot up into the air as if he had been propelled from a cannon.

"Dat's de berry las' time I done take hold ob a mule's tail when de mule am alive," he sorrowfully gasped, as he landed over into an adjoining field with a sea-sick feeling at his stomach.

Meanwhile the mule had succeeded in finally shaking Shoo-Fly off.

Having done so, it relapsed into its old condition of quiet.

It stood as quiet as a statue, and once more its spirit apparently was with the Kaffirs at Cape Colony, or the tall-eating Esquimaux,

Sadly Shoo-Fly collected his crowd together again.

"Boys," said he, "de nex' time that you go ridin', take an earthquake fo' a hoss befo' youse tackle a mule. Dis gang would do fust class to start a hospital wid."

They looked so.

Cotton had a black eye, and a blood-dyed nose, and his stomach had a strong look of goneness about it.

Pete was all broke up in every way, and didn't seem to have spirit enough left to snowball a drunken man.

The two Johnsing boys were bruised in all parts, and were a sick brace of orphans. As for Shoo-Fly, with his usual good luck, he wasn't hurt much—but he was sore.

The mule was the only one who had come out of the battle without a scar.

It was untouched.

Sorrowfully the crowd went home.

But the story of the mule ride got wind.

The street boys taunted Shoo-Fly with pointed allusions to mules and mule-back rides generally, and Shoo-Fly fought about half the village, on that account, inside of a week.

About this time Shoo-Fly played another joke on poor Uncle Pete that deserves recording.

Uncle Pete was no slouch of a bragger.

He had a great propensity for yarning about his personal prowess in a way that would have done credit to some old forecastle salt.

One night he sat in the kitchen reading the county paper.

"'Nother man stopped by tramps," he said, with a sniff.

"Who tole youse?" asked Shoo-Fly.

"In de paper."

"What paper? Paper of tobacker?"

"Youse are just as fresh as a three yeahs' ole colt," said Uncle Pete, with dignity. "'Spect dat I can't read?"

"In words ob one syllable, dat's all."

Uncle Pete responded by throwing the cat at Shoo-Fly, and said, with great dignity:

"Folks are all cowards now."

"'Cos dey 'sociate wid youse," slyly put in Shoo-Fly.

"Youse mean to say dat I'se a coward?"

"Is youse?"

"No, sah, I was all drew de war."

"In de sutler's wagon?"

"I fote in sebenty-five battles."

"Fote 'skeeters?"

"I was mos' killed at de battle ob Sebenteen Oaks."

"Dat was a pity."

"Ob course."

"Pity dat dey didn't kill youse all," finished up Shoo-Fly. "What are youse gibbin' me, Uncle Pete—lasses on a bean-pole?"

"I'se whistlin' truthfully, chile. I was on General Sigel's cane."

"On his staff, youse mean."

"All de same. I fote wid Sigel. Done tole youse what de tramps better not tackle me."

"Why?"

"'Cause I'se red blood bad. I'se wicked. Shoo-Fly when I'se gets real mad. Git reckless."

"G'way."

"Fact. Chew ear off. Oh, I'se a hot ole liquorish drop to pick up in a fight. 'Spects dat it would take mos' eight burglars fo' to skeer me."

"Oh, gib me de rest wid water in," growled Shoo-Fly, bent on provoking the old man. "Do youse know who youse kin fight?"

"Anybody."

"No, sah. All youse kin fight is consumptives, women, an' chillen under ten yeahs ole. Half of a good healthy tramp woold skeer de wool clear off of dat ole head ob youse."

"Fust ting youse know I'll cober dat mouf ob youse wif my foot," expressed Uncle Pete.

"I'se only joking," apologized Shoo-Fly. "Say, Uncle Pete."

"I'se listenin'."

"'Spose dat a robber would come into your house—what would youse do?"

"One robbah?"

"Yes, a lone hand."

Uncle Pete went through an original pantomime, designed to express shooting, stabbing, clubbing, and body-demolishing generally.

"I'd hurt him," he said.

"Hurt him?"

"Yes, chile."

"Hurt him bad?"

"Dere would be a dead body 'roun' in de mornin', an' it wouldn't be me," gently insinuated Uncle Pete. "Dat's all, chile," and Uncle Pete wound up the kitchen clock, raked down the fire, picked up his lantern, and started off to his little cabin.

Shoo-Fly sat and thought for a moment.

"Dat ole fool orter get a gold medal wid pink tassels onto it fo' lyin'," he reflected. "Dat's a nice ole image fo' a brave man. Shoo! a flea wid de lung fever could frow him in a wrestle! Wondah what he would do if a robber did get into his house?"

Shoo-Fly thought a little longer.

"Wondah what sort of a robber I would make?" he conjectured.

An old slouch hat of the deacon's hung onto the wall.

He put it on.

A dilapidated cloak, Miss Charity's property, was suspended over a chair.

He donned it.

Then he tore the cover off of one of his thrown-aside school-books, punched holes in it with a knife, and by the exercise of a little ingenuity, succeeded in completing quite a respectable looking mask.

He tied that about his head, and peered into the big looking-glass.

It was a great transformation. He hardly knew himself.

"Golly, Ise a tough-looking nigger," he chuckled, in delight. "Looks as if I fed on ram beef all ob de yeah. Bet I'd skeer de beef out ob Uncle Pete."

The last sentence contained a new inspiration.

He resolved to play robber.

To go down to Uncle Pete's board palace and put that worthy darkey's vaunted courage to the test.

"But I wants a weapon," he reflected. "Gib me a pistol."

A pistol, however, was not to be obtained.

They didn't grow about the kitchen.

There was only one thing that he could secure.

That was a carving knife.

A big-bladed carving knife, with a bone handle, that looked sufficiently ferocious to be the property of a practical pirate.

Shoo-Fly grabbed it.

"Get away dar, Leander," he cried, disemboweling a score of imaginary opponents. "I is Liver Lips McPuff, de Corsair Moke ob de Black Hills! Dis style in a pictur, six for ten dollars—in gilt frames!"

Satisfied with his robber-like appearance he started for Uncle Pete's.

He took a cautious survey of the house.

No light was visible.

All was calm and dark.

Uncle Pete had evidently got into bed without any unnecessary waste of time.

Shoo-Fly undid a shutter, for Uncle Pete, confident that he was safe from the intrusion of suspicious characters, did not take particular pains to render his dwelling unenterable.

He peeped in.

Uncle Pete was abed.

He listened.

A snore about as musical as the wail of a pig in a poke greeted his ears.

Uncle Pete was wrapped in the arms of Morpheus.

Shoo-Fly wrapped at the window.

"I'll wake up de ole runt afo' de circus begins," he said.

Uncle Pete heard the rap.

He started up.

"Wundah what dat is?" he thought. "Mebbe de ole stove in de kitchen hab done bust up."

Rap—rap! went Shoo-Fly's fist against the window panes.

Uncle Pete saw from what direction the noise was coming.

"Bet dat some ob dem Spanish chickens is a tryin' fo' to fly in at de windah," he said.

He turned his eyes windowward. Just then the moon emerged from behind a cloud and flooded the outside with her silver rays.

There was Shoo-Fly standing outside of the window in a particularly ferocious attitude, with his carving knife pointing grimly at Uncle Pete.

"Ber-lud!" yelled Shoo-Fly, with a frantic wave of the carving knife.

CHAPTER XI.

UNCLE PETE trembled like a leaf.

He gazed fearfully at the apparition outside of the window.

"De Lawd save us!" he uttered, with chattering teeth, as he dove his head beneath the bedclothes. "What am it?"

Shoo-Fly raised the window and stepped into the room.

Uncle Pete popped his head out of the quilt.

"G'way—g'way!" he cried. "I dunno you. What de debil do youse want?"

"Get out ob dat yere bed!" ordered Shoo-Fly.

"Wha' fo'?"

"Don't ax. Get out ob dat yere bed, or Ise'll cut yer libber out!"

This awful threat fairly paralyzed Uncle Pete.

He saw the flash of the gleaming carving-knife as it glittered in the moonlight, and visions of a select negro funeral filled his brain.

He got up.

"Lively, dar!" Shoo-Fly urged. "Don't take all night, kase Ise got to go kill seberal mo' men to-night!"

Uncle Pete shivered again.

This was a most bloodthirsty visitor; evidently a killer from Cow Bay.

"What's Ise got to arise fo'?" he tremblingly asked.

"Fo' example. Dance."

"Do what?" gasped Uncle Pete, his eyes bulging out.

"Dance," repeated Shoo-Fly. "Gib us a can-can. Go in fo' de beer. Tum-te-tum-te-tumity-tum. Put in de skylight touches, old man."

"But Ise kain't dance; Ise got de rheumatiz."

"Gib it away. Dance, youse ole black skelington, or Ise'll hab youse ears. Dey'll look nice to hab in de parlah when de minister comes aroun'."

Uncle Pete gave vent to a long-drawn-out sob, and commenced a sort of dance.

It resembled the Terpsichorean exercise of a ghoul on a tombstone.

"Dis yeah ain't a funeral," disgustedly said Shoo-Fly.

"Gib it to us hotter."

Poor Uncle Pete had to comply. The carving-knife looked as if it was thirsting for his blood.

Shoo-Fly thought that he would die a laughing to witness the corpse-like break-down of the old man.

"Dat'll do," he said, finally.

Uncle Pete stopped.

"Kin I go back to bed," he called.

"No, sah."

"Why not?"

"I wants somepin'."

"What am it?"

"Blood."

"Oh, Lawd!" groaned Uncle Pete. "Take de sofa."

"No, sah," answered Shoo-Fly, drawing the blade of the carving-knife over his thumb-nail. "Nuffin' will do but blood!"

"Take de bureau!" wailed Uncle Pete.

"No, sah, don't want de bureau. Nuffin' but blood—blood in a bucket!"

"Take de clock."

"Neber. Blood—blood—blood! Blood in de moon!" and Shoo-Fly went through some Indian club exercises with the carving-knife that sent Uncle Pete into a fit of fright.

"Oh, dear, good robber," he entreated, getting down on his knees.

"Spare my life, fo' de sake ob my wife," lied the black falsifier.

"Hab youse a wife?" Shoo-Fly asked.

"Seberal!"

"Any kids?"

"Forty-lebben-forty-four."

"Den I will spare your life. But I must hab blood!"

"Kill a cow."

"Human blood."

"Go up to de big house an' kill dat yer Shoo-Fly," suggested Uncle Pete, struck with a happy thought. "If youse'll only kill dat young debbil de whole town will gib youse a gold medal, shuah."

"Mebbe I will," promised Shoo-Fly. "Gib me your watch."

The watch to which he alluded was lying on the table.

It was a boss watch.

One of those fairy arrangements about the size of a cheese, and not much heavier than a small safe.

It never made the faintest pretence to keep time, but for all that it was a watch.

And as such was Uncle Pete's pleasure and pride.

"Don't take it," he begged. "It was gib to me by ole massa."

"Ole massa who?"

"General Washin'ton."

"General Mud," sneered Shoo-Fly. "Did he gib youse de watch?"

"Fo' Moses."

"Den I is Gen'ral Washin'ton's darter. De watch are mine."

Uncle Pete started forward as if with a desperate intention of securing his pet property.

But a vicious forward thrust of the carving-knife sent him back again.

Shoo-Fly glanced about.

Quietly reposing in a tumbler of water was Uncle Pet's greatest pet, his set of false teeth.

Shoo-Fly grabbed them.

Uncle Pete uttered a piteous wail.

"Luff go of dem!" he shouted.

"Ah, base infidel," roared Shoo-Fly. "Who's youse talkin' to?"

"Please leave de teefe."

"What fo'?"

"How is I to eat?"

"Don't eat?"

"But I'se can't chew meat."

"Chew gum-drops. Dese ere teefe am too good fo' youse. Spect dat youse better get wooden ones."

"Take anything else in de house, eben de roof," begged Pete. "Whar is I to get a new set?"

"Dig in the back yard fo' dem. Good-by."

"Oh!" pleaded Uncle Pete, the tears coming into his eyes. "I'se gib yer all de money dat I hab in de house fo' dem teefe."

"Dar ain't no good talkin'," firmly asserted Shoo-Fly. "Dese yere grub-chewers are mine. Is'e gwine tooth kerr-lectin'; gwine to build a pagoda wid dem."

"A who?" queried Uncle Pete.

"A pagoda."

"Who's dat?"

"Bite it an' see. Good-night," and out slipped Shoo-Fly through the window, with the teeth and the watch.

Next morning Uncle Pete was down to the house at break of day.

"Massa Hoyt—Massa Hoyt!" he called out to the deacon.

"Well, what is it?" sleepily asked the deacon, as he came out of the house, rubbing his eyes.

"I'se been robbed."

"Robbed?"

"Deedy I have. Oh, I'se a poah, no account niggah got no fren's."

Just then Shoo-Fly arrived.

"Whose gibbin' us taffy 'bout being robbed?" he asked.

"Me," responded Uncle Pete.

"Youse been robbed?"

"Shuah!"

"Who did it?"

"Dar was six ob dem," asserted Uncle Pete.

"Six?" echoed the deacon.

"Yes, sah, six ob de biggest debils dat eber you seed. Dey was armed to de neck wid pistols an' guns, an' spears an' swords an' knives."

"Funny dat sich a very reckless gang could be aroun' heah and nobody see dem," commented Shoo-Fly.

"Oh, I'se a tootin' my whistle truefully," replied Uncle Pete.

"How were they dressed?" asked the deacon.

"Dey had long cloaks on an' black masks."

"I'd a thought dat you'd a licked dem," said Shoo-Fly.

Uncle Pete swelled up in conscious pride.

"See dat hand?" he asked, extending one black paw.

"Dat's de wuss hand I ebber saw," criticised Shoo-Fly.

"Looks jess like a ham cut in two, an' de wuss piece left."

"Dat hand," said Uncle Pete, solemnly, "were colored wid blood!"

"Did youse slug dem?"

"Do what?"

"Slug dem."

"Chile," said Uncle Pete, "slugging was not de expression. Did youse ebber see a cow step into a lot ob bull-frogs. De cow was me, an' de bull-frogs was de robbers. I jess grasped de bureau."

"De what?"

"De bureau. Git me excited an' I'se iron, chile—an' I went fo' de crowd. Dere were eight ob dem."

"You said six befo'."

"Dar were two more outside ob de house dat I didn't count. Well, as I said, I clutched de washstand—"

"Youse said bureau."

"I had dem bofe—one in each han', an' I started. Tole youse what, 'twasn't free minutes afo' I had all ob de nine on de floah!"

"Nine what?"

"Robbers, you little fool! 'Spect dat I'se talking 'bout horse-flies?"

"Dere was only eight robbers jess befo', youse said."

"I foun' de oder one hid in de chimley. Who's done telling dis narrative, you or me?"

"You," answered Shoo-Fly.

"Well, Uncle Pete," put in the deacon, "did you get robbed of anything?"

"I should done blush, massa."

"Of what?"

"De best I had!"

"Your tin bank?"

"Wuss dan dat!"

"Your clothes?"

"Wusser!"

"Your teeth?"

"Dat's it—dat's it," moaned Uncle Pete. "How is I to be a 'spectable member ob society widout any teefe? Nice ole chromo I will be fo' a church fair."

"But what in the world possessed them to take only your teeth?"

"Debility, I suppose; but dey took sumpin' else."

"What?"

"My watch."

"Those robbers must be curiosities," laughed the deacon; "eight of them."

"Nine," corrected Uncle Pete.

"Nine, then. Nine of them to break into your house and steal only a set of false teeth and an old brass watch that isn't worth two cents."

"Play light, sah, play light on de rappelations ob dat watch," asked Uncle Pete. "It was de intrinsic merit ob that watch, not de monetary value that rendered it ob great worth. Dar ain't another watch like it in de country."

"Owing to a merciful Providence"—repeated Shoo-Fly, from his Sunday-school lesson.

All that day Uncle Pete told April fool stories about his robbery.

The number of robbers gradually increased.

At last they got to be nearly seventy.

Uncle Pete even told Miss Charity that he thought that they had a cannon with them.

"If it hadn't been dat I braced right up to dem dere would hab been a dead nigger on ice 'round dis heah vicinity dis mauning," he said. "Golly, youse oughter hab seed me lay dem out."

At last Shoo-Fly got sick of hearing the bragging lies of the old man.

He determined to expose the whole racket, and get a grand laugh on the ancient Munchausen.

That night, as usual, the whole of the deacon's family were clustered about the cozy sitting-room.

The deacon was reading the county paper, Miss Charity was sewing. Uncle Pete was mending a whip-lash, and Shoo-Fly was sitting on a stool by the fire, playing with his parrot, and endeavoring to learn that ignorant and utterly depraved bird his "A. B. C's."

"It is remarkable, Peter," observed the deacon, "that nobody saw, or heard, or knew anything about your robbers. I have made inquiries all around the village to-day. Where did they go?"

"Mebbe dey rode away on horses," hazarded Uncle Pete, stopping at his work.

"Dey didn't do nuffin' ob de sort," contradicted Shoo-Fly.

"Some penny niggahs have shillin' moufs," sneered Uncle Pete. "What do youse know 'bout it?"

"Lots."

"G'way."

"It's so. In de fust place, dem wasn't any robbers."

"Course not. 'Spect dat I dreamed it," sarcastically said Uncle Pete. "I got up in de night an' stole my own teefe, didn't I?"

"Noap."

"Mebbe it was de parrot?"

"Noap. What will youse gib me if I tole youse?"

The deacon put down his pipe, and Miss Charity neglected her sewing. Uncle Pete stopped short in his operation, and let the unfinished whip-lash fall to the floor. Even the parrot assumed a listening attitude on Shoo-Fly's knee.

"You mean to say dat you know who was de culprits?" asked Uncle Pete.

"Shuah," answered Shoo-Fly.

"Youse crazy."

"Nebber. What'll youse gib me if I tole youse?"

"Ten cents."

"Shoo! youse too liberal."

"Fifteen."

"Raise de rate."

"Twenty."

"Dat's a terrible lot of gold, ain't it? Dose teefe are worfe ten dollars to youse."

"Twenty-five; dat's a lot o' money, chile. But youse ain't gibing me no sleigh-ride?"

"Not much; put de reward up higher an' I'se'll gib de robbers away."

"All right."

"Whar's de money?"

"Gib it to you bime-by."

"No, sah," answered Shoo-Fly. "Dis yeah transaction am C. I. A.—Cash in advance."

Uncle Pete felt in his pockets. After diligent search and a thorough ransacking of his garments, he raked up two battered quarters.

He handed them over to Shoo-Fly. Nobody's Moke took them, bit them to ascertain their genuineness, and then put them carefully away in his shoe.

"Now I'll tole youse who de bugglars was," he said.

"Who?" asked Uncle Pete, while the deacon and Miss Charity both bent forward expectantly.

"Dey was me."

"You!"

"Shuah as preachin'."

"Put de chile to bed wid ice on de head," compassionately remarked Uncle Pete. "He hab done gone crazy!"

"Youse a liar, is I," complacently replied Shoo-Fly, as he proceeded to give the whole racket away.

At first his listeners were incredulous.

"Isn't that a sort of fairy tale, Shoo-Fly?" the deacon queried.

"Dat's de mos' remarkable romance dat I ebber heard," contemptuously commented Uncle Pete.

"I kin prove it," said Shoo-Fly.

"How?"

"Wait fo' a year or two till I return wid de vouchers." Shoo-Fly went to his own little room above the kitchen. He returned very soon.

In his hand he held a small newspaper bundle.

"What hab youse got in dere?" asked Uncle Pete.

Shoo-Fly grinned.

A grin of conscious superiority.

He slowly unrolled the bundle.

"Look at dere!" he said.

Uncle Pete craned his neck forward and gazed at the articles in Shoo-Fly's hands.

"Dat's my teefe an' my watch, shuah as I is a sinful niggah!" he faintly exclaimed.

The continuation and conclusion of this story can be found in THE FIVE CENT WIDE AWAKE LIBRARY No. 282, entitled, "Shoo-Fly; or, Nobody's Moke," by Tom Teaser.

Part II.

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